

Priest

DANIEL SYSOEV

# THE LAW OF GOD



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The publishers wish to express their sincere gratitude to artist Elena Cherkasova for permission to use her work in this edition.

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*This edition is dedicated to the six-year anniversary  
of the martyric end of the author.*

**Priest Daniel Sysoev**

The Law of God: An Introduction to Orthodox Christianity. — New-Jersey, Daniel Sysoev Inc, 2016. — 544 p.

This new edition of The Law of God will serve for the enrichment of catechists and professors of various schools. Many textbooks, including the venerable work by Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy, have become dated primarily in terms of the language used. The old phraseology needs to be expanded and explained in contemporary language—a need that has been met in this work by Father Daniel Sysoev.

To choose the proper wording is to find the key to the heart of the reader. Such was the goal of the late author of this book. Father Daniel spent ten years laboring at its creation, working on it until the final year of his life, constantly redoing and rewriting individual passages. And yet *The Law of God* is not the fruit of the labors and efforts of one man, for in the field of catechesis it is impossible not to draw on the expertise of the holy fathers and, above all, Holy Scripture.

Upon opening this book the believer will find himself in the catechetical school of Father Daniel, will hear his living voice, and will delve into the profound inner world of this talented priest, Christian author, exegete, and missionary.

**Archpriest Oleg Stenyaev**

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY



## Part I

# FUNDAMENTALS OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH



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## TWO PATHS

Our planet, lost in the vastness of the universe, is inhabited by billions of strange sentient beings. Created of dust and subject to the laws of matter, they find no rest on this corruptible earth. Their life is unique, yet despite this uniqueness it is relatively stable, following a well-beaten track. They perform their actions instinctively, automatically, immersed in mundanity. All their countless tracks eventually converge into two basic roads, two paths. It is these beings, called men, for whom this book is written, that they might learn the true path, follow it, and find their eternal Fatherland of peace.

Of what sort are these paths?

The first of them is evil and filled with cursing. It is followed by those who violate the will of God, the Sovereign Lord of the universe. These are the workers of every kind of evil: unbelievers, atheists, heretics, idol-worshippers, sorcerers, murderers, adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, thieves, oppressors, slanderers, committers of abortion, liars, cowards, drunkards, drug addicts, hypocrites, and all workers of every kind of unrighteousness. This path will perish along with all who follow it. So promises the Omnipotent Judge (Ps. 1:6), and so it assuredly will be!

But there is another path. Whereas the first is glorified in the newspapers, exalted in television shows, and thrust on us in commercials, the second lies forgotten. But this does not mean it does not exist. It exists, and if for one moment there were no one following it the entire mass of the world would be perish in the flames of a global inferno in the blink of an eye. This second path is called the path of the righteous, and the guide on this



path is God Himself. It is followed by the faithful, the merciful, the meek, the chaste, the continent, those who love, the pure in heart, the courageous, lovers of God, the humble, and all who fulfill the will of the Unoriginate Father. They will receive eternal life and joy in the Kingdom of the Lord, and this is a certainty.

At its heart this path is Divine, because Christ Himself said that He is the Way, i.e., the path, to the Father: *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me* (Jn. 14:6). But until the eternal sun begins to dawn, those who follow it must have the Law of God to light their way. The Word of God, the Bible, says that the will of the righteous man is *in the law of the Lord, and in His law will he meditate day and night* (Ps. 1:2). And this is no surprise, for it is written, *Thy law is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my paths* (Ps. 118:105).

This book is a short guidebook on the second path, and it is intended for those who, in setting out upon this path, wish to learn the fundamentals of Orthodox faith and life, as well as sacred history. For without knowing the past works of God, how are His present works to be recognized?

## ON FAITH

**T**he first work of God that we must do is to acquire faith, without which we can neither come to God, nor even learn Who He is. For it is written that *without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him* (Heb. 11:6).

What is faith, after all? The Bible says, *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1). In the words of St. John of Damascus it is, “the undoubting and unthinking hope in what God has promised us, and in the success of our petitions.”<sup>1</sup>

In its action “faith is an eye that illumines every conscience and imparts reason, for the prophet says, *If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established* (Is. 7:9). What could be more terrible than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other weapon than faith—that immaterial shield against the enemy.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, true faith not only does not contradict the intellect, but on the contrary reveals to it horizons hitherto unknown. What can knowledge

<sup>1</sup> St. John of Damascus, *A Precise Exposition of the Faith*, IV, 10.

<sup>2</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, V, 4.

based on experience understand? Only the thin film on the surface of matter, or a single facet of a phenomenon in a limited cross section of time. But faith takes a person beyond the limits of space and time and reveals to him the mysteries of God. Knowledge grows from the mind, though it likewise affects the heart, and faith is placed in the heart, though it also changes the thoughts. Thus, the assertion that faith and intellect contradict each other is a fallacy. This contradiction occurs only when either the faith is false, or when the intellect is afflicted with pride and ignorance.

Frequently people say that faith is blindness of the mind, a rejection of thought, and a sign of a primitive mentality. The absurdity of this assertion is obvious. Bear in mind that the greatest minds of all mankind were firm believers—Dostoevsky, Newton, Mendeleev, Plato, Aristotle, Pascal, St. Luke (Voino-Yasenetsky), Maxwell, and many others. Were they all really incapable of realizing their “obvious mistake”? Of course not; the answer is quite different. A person whose life has veered from the paths of the Creator’s commandments begins searching for “just cause” to reject the Word of God. As Christ said, *every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved* (Jn. 3:20).

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Faith has two forms. We call the first of these *belief in God*, and the second—*trust in God*. The first is limited to recognition of the Creator’s existence, but this need not necessarily affect one’s life. The Bible says that even the demons have this kind of faith: *the devils also believe, and tremble* (Jas. 2:19). This faith is not perfect, and man cannot please God with this kind of faith alone. The second type of faith presumes trust in the Creator’s words and a rejection of self-reliance, an active increase in love. It is this kind of faith that is salvific.

One who preserves the Orthodox faith out of a desire to live righteously can do anything. The Lord said, *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you* (Mt. 17:20). This desire need only not contradict the will of God. And this is no mere fable!

Once Abba Serapion came to St. Mark the Ascetic. St. Mark began asking him about the state of the Church, and inquired, “Are there Christians who have such faith that they can even say to a mountain, ‘Move from here over to there’?” At these words the mountain on which they were sitting moved two and a half kilometers toward the sea. Seeing this, St. Mark said to the mountain, “I was not speaking to you; I am talking with my brother. Return to your place!” And it immediately returned to its former place.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox Calendar, by St. Demetrius of Rostov, for April 5 (old style).

Thus, faith can work miracles, not in and of itself, as some think who are deceived, but by God's power, because it draws the grace of Almighty God to the believer, providing that this faith is Orthodox. And faith is Orthodox when it strictly adheres to God's Revelation, adding nothing to it and subtracting nothing.

## ON GOD

Now we must say a few words concerning the identity of the God in Whom Christians believe. At present we will introduce only general concepts, which will be developed later on.

Thus, God is a Spirit that is one, eternal, bodiless, invisible, incomprehensible, unchanging, all-good, holy, all-righteous, omnipresent, almighty, all-knowing, loving, most wise, all-complete, in need of nothing. He is the source of goodness and righteousness, the light unapproachable, the power beyond all measure, measurable by His own will alone—for all that He wishes He is able to do. He is the Creator of all creatures visible and invisible, all-encompassing, uncircumscribable, yet preserving and providing for all things. He is the Ruler Who rules over all things and reigns with a kingdom that is unending and immortal, Who has no rival whatsoever. His power permeates all essences, itself remaining pure, abiding beyond the bounds of all things and set apart from all entities as supreme in essence and above all that exists, which establishes all authorities and ranks, but is itself above all authority and rank, above essence, life, word, and understanding. God is Light itself, Goodness itself, Life itself, Love itself, Essence itself, for He has no other existence nor anything of what exists, but rather is Himself the source of existence for all that exists, of life for all that lives, of reason for all that is rational, the cause of every good for all creatures. He has known everything before it ever came to be. He is the Savior of the perishing, the Healer of the suffering, and the righteous Judge of all creation.

God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet He is not three Gods, but one God. Three Persons (Hypostases), but one Essence, one glory, one might and Kingdom, one will. The Father eternally begets the Son and from His essence brings forth the Holy Spirit.

To help clarify this mystery for ourselves we may compare God to the sun. It is one, yet in it one may distinguish the orb, the rays, and the warmth. All three phenomena are a single whole, though they are not identical to one



another. So also the Father eternally begets the Son, like the ray of sunshine, and brings forth the Holy Spirit, like the warmth. This comparison falls short in that the ray and the warmth are not equal to the sun's orb, whereas the Son and the Spirit are equal to the Father.

We ourselves resemble God in another way. Our rational soul possesses the power of verbal expression and the power to enliven the body. But here again we have not a perfect analogy, but only a feeble likeness. For mind, word, and life are not separate persons, but properties of a single consciousness, whereas in God the Mind, the Word, and the Spirit are three Persons, three Egos. Hence, it is wisest to humbly bow before this Mystery of mysteries, hidden even from the flaming heavenly seraphim. One can only come to know the Trinity through love for God from a pure heart. As the apostle John the Theologian says, *he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him* (1 Jn. 4:16).

Once, Blessed Augustine was walking along the seashore, pondering the mystery of the Holy Trinity, when he happened upon a little boy who had dug a little hole in the sand and was spooning water from the sea into it.

“What are you doing?” Augustine asked in surprise.

“I want to pour the sea into this hole here,” the boy replied.

“But that is impossible! The hole is too small. How can the sea fit into it?”

“And how is it that you attempt with your small mind to understand the mystery of the everlasting Trinity?” the boy replied, and became invisible.

Thus the angel showed both the saint and us the incomprehensibility of the Divinity, before Whom our weak mind must bow.

## DIVINE REVELATION

Though incomprehensible, God has not left His creation without knowledge of Himself and His works. Through the Holy Spirit He has revealed His will to righteous men of a pure heart. These are called prophets and apostles. According to St. John Chrysostom, it ought to be that every man would willingly hear the Word of God, but since we have become mired in sins and pleasuring the flesh, God in His mercy has left us His Revelation, handed down to us by men.

There is both natural and supernatural Revelation. When philosophers marveled at his wisdom, St. Anthony the Great would answer thus: “I read two books—Nature and Scripture—and through them I come to know God the Creator.”

The first of these books clearly teaches to contemplate the might, the wisdom, and the mastery of the Lord and His care for the world, while Scripture, supernatural Revelation, also reveals His attributes and His intentions for the world and for men. Even the pagans, who do not know the Scriptures, are not left without the knowledge of God that is placed into their hearts, handed down to them through Tradition from their ancestors, and garnered from contemplating nature. For this reason they will have no excuse on the day of Judgment: *For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse* (Rom. 1:20).

Without supernatural Revelation, however, God would remain for us a distant Power, mighty but obscure. God’s direct intervention alone has revealed His own Self to us. How did this Revelation take place? St. Basil the Great gives this description of the state of prophecy: “In what manner did the pure and illumined souls prophecy? Having become, as it were,

a mirror of Divine action, they revealed in themselves a clear, unmingled image undarkened by fleshly passions. For the Holy Spirit abides in everyone, but reveals His own power in those who are pure of passions, not in those in whom the masterful part of the soul [i.e., the mind — *Auth.*] is darkened by sinful impurities ... when the soul, having dedicated itself to every labor of virtue, through strong love for God constantly preserves in itself unsullied the remembrance of God impressed upon it, and in this manner makes God as it were to live in itself, then, having become divinely inspired through strong effort and ineffable love for God, it is made worthy of the gift of prophecy, because God bestows Divine power and opens one's spiritual eyes to the understanding of whatever visions it pleases Him to impart...

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“Some say that they prophesied in ecstasy, so that the human mind was blotted out by the Spirit. But it is contrary to the promise of God's overshadowing to make mad the divinely-inspired one, so that when filled with divine instructions he would take leave of his proper reason and, while bringing benefit to others, himself obtain no benefit from his own words. And in general, is it in any way in accordance with reason that the Spirit of Wisdom would make a person like one robbed of his mind, and that the Spirit of Knowledge would destroy reason from within him? But light does not produce darkness; on the contrary, it arouses the power of sight given by nature. And the Spirit does not produce darkening in souls; on the contrary, it arouses the mind, cleansed of sinful stains, to the contemplation of the noetic.”<sup>4</sup>

In this manner we receive infallible and unerring knowledge of God, the world, and man. But though one in essence, it is spread by the power of the Holy Spirit in two ways: through Scripture and through Tradition.

## HOLY TRADITION

The most ancient form of transmitting Divine Revelation is Holy Tradition. Until the time of the prophet Moses (in the 16th century B.C.) this was done solely by word of mouth. Tradition is the name given to communication by believers under the Lord's guidance of the teachings, laws, and rules for living received from God. True life was handed down by the prophets and apostles to the next generation of believers. Its source is the eternal Spirit,

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<sup>4</sup> Saint Basil the Great, *Collected Works*, II, Moscow, 1891, pp. 7, 8, 10.



through Whom Revelation was not distorted in making its way through the ages eliminating the “broken telephone” factor. Thus, the faithful preserver of Tradition is, as envisioned by the apostle Paul, *the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Tim. 3:15).

If it were not for Tradition, the Bible itself would be completely inaccessible as a means of conveying God’s Revelation. Can lifeless letters really give an accurate description of the living word of the Creator, when even in ordinary speech intonation and body language play such a tremendous role? So also in the Church Scripture is interpreted through holy men by the same Spirit that gave it. Even Scripture itself shows that without interpretation it is difficult or even impossible to understand it correctly. In answer to Philip’s question, *Understandest thou what thou readest?* the eunuch replied, *How can I, except some man should guide me?* (Acts 8:30–31).

St. Vincent of Lerins gives this definition of the criteria for distinguishing true Tradition from mere Christian customs that are not part of Divine Revelation: “... when we adhere to universality, antiquity, and concord. We adhere to universality when we acknowledge as true only the faith confessed by the Church throughout the globe; to antiquity when we in no way depart from those concepts that have undoubtedly been approved by our holy ancestors and fathers; and to concord when in antiquity itself we adhere to the definitions and concepts of all, or at least the majority, of the priests and the teachers together.”<sup>5</sup>

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## HOLY SCRIPTURE

The most important part of Tradition is Holy Scripture, through which great accuracy is maintained in relaying Revelation. Scripture is the name given to the books written by the Holy Spirit through the prophets and apostles, and collectively these books are called the Bible (from the Greek word for book).

The Bible consists of two parts: the Old and the New Testaments. The word *Testament* means a union between God and men.

The *Old Testament* was written prior to the Coming of Christ, and its chief message was the promise of the Coming of the Savior and the preparation of men for this.

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<sup>5</sup> Peregrinus, *Commonitory for the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith*, II.



The Old Testament books of Holy Scripture include five books written by the holy God-seer and prophet Moses, called *the books of the Law*:

1. Genesis (Gen.)
2. Exodus (Ex.)
3. Leviticus (Lev.)
4. Numbers (Num.)
5. Deuteronomy (Deut.)

Next follow the *historical books*:

6. Joshua (Josh.)
7. Judges (Judg.)
8. Ruth (the latter two books are traditionally ascribed to the holy prophet Samuel)
- 9–12. The four books of Kings (1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings. The first two books are ascribed to the prophet Samuel; the third and fourth were written by the Old Testament prophets, and unified by the prophet Jeremiah)
- 13–14. The two books of Chronicles (1 Chron., 2 Chron. These were based on the chronicles of the prophets; their final version was arranged by Saint Ezra.)
15. 1 Ezra
16. Nehemiah (Neh.; in the canons this book is frequently called the Second Book of Ezra)
17. Esther (Est.)

The *didactic books*:

18. Job (the most ancient book of the Bible, written by St. Job himself, but edited by St. Solomon)
19. The Psalter of the Holy King David (Ps.)
20. Proverbs (Prov.)
21. Solomon's Ecclesiastes (Eccl.)
22. Solomon's Song of Songs (Song of Sol.)

The Old Testament canon is concluded by the *prophetic books*:

23. Isaiah (Is.)
24. Jeremiah (Jer.)
25. Lamentations of Jeremiah (Lam.)
26. Ezekiel (Ezek.)
27. Daniel (Dan.)
28. Hosea (Hos.)

29. Joel (Joel)
30. Amos
31. Obadiah (Obad.)
32. Jonah (Jon.)
33. Micah (Mic.)
34. Nahum (Nah.)
35. Habakkuk (Hab.)
36. Zephaniah (Zeph.)
37. Haggai (Hag.)
38. Zechariah (Zech.)
39. Malachi (Mal.)

In addition to these books, which are called *canonical*, i.e., standard, Scripture also has *noncanonical books*:

40. Baruch (Bar.)
41. Letter of Jeremiah (Letter of Jer.)
42. Wisdom of Solomon (Wisd.)
43. Wisdom of Joshua, Son of Sirach (Sir.)
44. Judith (Judith)
45. Tobit (Tob.)
46. 2 Ezra
47. 3 Ezra
48. The three books of the Maccabees (1, 2, 3 Macc.)<sup>6</sup>

The authority of these latter books is great, though some do not consider them equal to the canonical books. In any case they contain God's Revelation.

The *New Testament* announces that the promised Savior has come and has redeemed us from sin, the curse, and death. The New Testament contains only canonical books.

*Books of the Law:*

1. The Gospel of Matthew (Mt.)
2. The Gospel of Mark (Mk.)
3. The Gospel of Luke (Lk.)
4. The Gospel of John (Jn.)

*Historical books:*

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<sup>6</sup> *Translator's note:* The division into books follows the Slavonic usage.

## 5. Acts of the Apostles (Acts)

*Didactic books*—these are the epistles of the apostles.

The general epistles addressed to all the churches:

## 6. James (Jas.)

## 7–8. 1 and 2 Peter (1, 2 Pet.)

## 9–11. 1, 2, and 3 John (1, 2, 3 Jn.)

## 12. Jude

The epistles of the apostle Paul:

## 13. Romans (Rom.)

## 14–15. 1 and 2 Corinthians (1, 2 Cor.)

## 16. Galatians (Gal.)

## 17. Ephesians (Eph.)

## 18. Philippians (Phil.)

## 19. Colossians (Col.)

## 20–21. 1 and 2 Thessalonians (1, 2 Thess.)

## 22–23. 1 and 2 Timothy (1, 2 Tim.)

## 24. Titus (Tit.)

## 25. Philemon (Philem.)

## 26. Hebrews (Heb.)

And, finally, a *prophetic book*:

## 27. The Apocalypse (Revelation) of John the Theologian (Rev.)

These books contain all that is necessary for salvation. By reading them with prayer and understanding them in accordance with the Church we can learn the will of God.

“Someone once asked St. Anthony, ‘What should I do to please God?’ ‘What I command you, this keep faithfully,’ the elder replied. ‘Wherever you may go, always have God before you. Whatever you may do, have a witness to this in Holy Scripture. And wherever you may live, do not be quick to leave that place. Keep these three commandments and you will be saved.’”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *The Patericon, or Memorable Sayings on the Asceticism of the Saints and Blessed Fathers*, 3.

## THE SYMBOL OF FAITH

**T**he basics of the Orthodox faith, without following which one cannot be an Orthodox Christian and salvation cannot be obtained, are the Symbol of Faith, or the Creed. One must know it in order to know God and to please Him.

A person reads the Symbol of Faith from memory before his baptism, it is sung at the Liturgy, and one wishing to offer repentance must likewise first recite the Symbol of Faith. The church canons also require this of those wishing to enter into holy matrimony.

This text in its content is completely grounded in Divine Revelation. It was adopted in its current form by the fathers of the Ecumenical Councils—the First Council in Nicaea (A.D. 325) and the Second Council in Constantinople (A.D. 381).

The Ecumenical Council is a convening of the bishops of the whole ecumenical or universal Church, who, as we believe, were guided by God the Holy Spirit Himself. And it is under His guidance that the Church has preserved the original Revelation, passing it down in precise formulae and crushing every falsehood. The most precise summary of Christian dogma is the Symbol of Faith itself, which we are about to examine.

The Greek word *symbol* has many meanings and connotations, and may be translated in 29 different ways, which is indicative of the particular shades of meaning of this sacred declaration of faith. In its ancient meaning this word signified a rod or circle broken in two, the halves of which were taken by friends or lovers when parting for a long time. Even after many years had passed they could recognize each other by reuniting the halves of the symbol. So also our Eternal Friend and Bridegroom Christ left us this faith, like half of a ring by which He will recognize us on the Day of His return. Clearly, if we lose our half, or even mar it, altering the point of junction, there will be no recognition at our meeting. Christ will say, *I never knew you: depart from Me* (Mt. 7:23).

Another translation of the word symbol is “oath.” We Christians believe that Jesus Christ is our only Lord and King. Hence, in entering His Church, which is called the Church Militant, we take an oath to Him as our Eternal Emperor. Naturally, if we renounce our oath after Baptism we will show ourselves oath-breakers and deserters, and will fall under God’s Judgment.

The word *symbol* can also be translated as “password,” one by which we will be admitted into Paradise restored. This password we must require of anyone wishing to enter into our heart, and our mind must guard our heart, standing sentry so that no one may rob us.

The holy Symbol of Faith must be taken to heart and preserved until the end of our life. If there are no problems with one’s memory, this text



must be learned by heart. In church read the Symbol of Faith in Church Slavonic, which is used for worship in Russia; hence, in this language it must be learned.<sup>8</sup>

## The Symbol of Faith

1. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things visible and invisible.

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2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten,  
begotten of the Father before all ages;  
Light of Light: true God of true God;  
begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father,  
by Whom all things were made.

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3. Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from the heavens,  
and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

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4. And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,  
and suffered, and was buried.

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5. And arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

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6. And ascended into the heavens,  
and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.

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7. And shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead;  
Whose Kingdom shall have no end.

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8. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life;  
Who proceedeth from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son  
together is worshipped and glorified;  
Who spake by the prophets.

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9. In One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

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10. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.

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11. I look for the resurrection of the dead ...

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12. ... and the life of the age to come. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Translator's note: Naturally, this pertains to natives of Slavic countries. Each should learn the Symbol of Faith primarily in his own liturgical language.

## EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOL OF FAITH

The Symbol of Faith consists of twelve parts, or articles. We will examine each in turn.

1. *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

Faith here is by no means a blind act of rejecting reason, as atheists think. On the contrary, it is reason in full bloom. Man finds the Creator with his mind and his heart, and thereafter he trusts Him. Thus, when a person begins to believe, first he recognizes the existence of invisible realities, and through his reason new horizons are revealed. Next he begins to trust God, and in this manner his life gains stability.

The chief object of the faith of Christians is *God*. This word we understand to mean the everlasting Spiritual Being, Who cannot be fully comprehended in His immeasurable might, wisdom, and glory. God is omnipresent and eternal (outside of time), omnipotent, and knows everything. He is perfect Truth and Love; He needs nothing and Himself generously gives all things. God is not anything that exists in the universe. He is not matter, not energy, not the cosmos, not a supreme intellect, not a higher part of the soul. On the contrary, all that exists receives its being from Him: all that lives—its life, all that reasons—its reason, all that is strong—its strength.

God is called *one* not because people are worshipping Him no matter whom they worship—far from it. Rather, it is because He alone is the true One That Is, and all others are false gods (Zeus, Krishna, Perun)—a falsehood devoid of existence, but behind which fallen angels lurk. Thus, beside God the Creator in Whom the Christians believe there is no other god.

The one God is called the *Father* because He is the Personality Who begets the Son without beginning. But He likewise becomes the Father for each person who comes to believe in His Son and receives baptism. God the Father has never proceeded from anyone, and hence is also called unbegotten and unoriginate.

He is called *Almighty* because the whole world exists to this day due to His power sustaining the universe. The whole world is also ruled by His almighty will, which facilitates every good, and cuts off every evil arising from free beings' rejection of good, turning this evil to a good end.

God the Father is further called *Creator of heaven and earth*, for, by His free will and without the help of anyone, in six days He created the universe out of nothing. And the purpose of this creation was that all free and rational beings might enter into His eternal bliss.

The *visible and invisible* worlds are the material universe and the spiritual world.

The material universe was governed by man, created in the image of God and intended to become the Lord's likeness. The *angels* and our immortal souls pertain to the invisible world. *Angel* (from the Greek word meaning "messenger") is the name given to created rational and powerful spirits who have no material body. Through pride part of them fell away from God and became *demons*, who spawned all the evil in the universe. *Satan*, their chief, seduced the first people. After their rebellion the demons became confirmed for all time in their hatred for God, and the gloom of eternal darkness is prepared for them.

However, all that exists, both visible and invisible, was created from nonexistence by the free will of the Father.

*2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light: true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made.*

As has already been said, God is called the Father because He begat the Son, and here we see how the Church describes her faith in Christ in detail.

Thus, for us Jesus Christ is not a great initiate or a moral teacher, not a mere prophet or the first revolutionary, but the eternal God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. He is called *one* because He is a single Person, though existing in two natures. He is called *Lord*, for He is by nature the Master of creation. His kingdom is the kingdom of all the ages, and His sovereignty is in every generation. But He is our Lord in a particular sense: as our Redeemer and the Head of the Church.

He received the name *Jesus* after He became a man. This name means "He Who came to save," or simply "Savior." The word *Christ* is not a name at all, but rather the designation of His ministry after the Incarnation. In translation it means "Anointed One," because as a man He was anointed by His Divinity. "For in His own person He anointed Himself; as God anointing His body with His own divinity, and as Man being anointed. For He Himself is both God and Man. And the anointing is the divinity of His humanity."<sup>9</sup> The anointing was given to him as King, Prophet, and Priest, for in ancient times, in the Old Testament era, kings, prophets, and priests were appointed to their service through anointing with blessed oil, and hence were called christs (i.e., "anointed ones").

Jesus is called *Only-begotten* because He alone is begotten of the essence of God the Father, unlike the other children of God (men and angels), whose essence differs from that of the Father.

<sup>9</sup> St. John of Damascus. *Exposition of the Faith*, III, 3.

The next words, *begotten of the Father before all ages*, emphasizes that the Son is begotten of the Father's essence before the beginning of time (which came into being along with the world). The universe may not yet have even existed, but the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and His birth resembles the way one candle is lit from another: the first flame is not diminished, and the second flame is equal to the first. The Son is eternally linked with the Father as the sun is with the ray of sunlight. He is the radiance of His glory and the image of His Person; He is the eternal self-expression of the Father, His Word, Wisdom, and Power.

The Son, like the Father, is true God, unlike the false demigods of the pagans and the heathen. Yet one must not think that there are two or three Gods. All three Persons of the Trinity are the One God, as the single source of divinity is the Father. All three Persons have a single essence (nature), will, kingdom, glory, and power, and they abide eternally in each other, differing only in that the Father is not begotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit proceeds.



To emphasize the authenticity of Christ's divinity, the Symbol of Faith states that He is *begotten, not made, of one (and the same) essence with the Father*. Unlike all other beings, Christ is not a creation, but the offspring of the Father's essence.

By *Whom all things were made* — i.e., through the Son the Father created the world (Col. 1:16, Jn. 1:3, Heb. 1:3, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, ch. 2; St. John of Kronstadt, *On the Creation of the World*). Yet the Father did not use the Son as a tool, but as the accomplisher of His will; hence, all the universe belongs to the Lord Jesus. All was created by Him and for Him, and all exists by His power. It was for this reason that He saved the world that He Himself had created.

3. *Who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.*

As we have already said, the very name *Jesus* means "Savior." Beginning with this article, or section, the Symbol presents in detail how our salvation was accomplished. But from what did we need to be saved? The Church gives the answer: from sin, the curse, and death.

The truth is, the first people, Adam and Eve, fell away from God, the source of life, by committing sin. As a result, man's very nature was subjected to corruption. His mind lost control over his will and feelings, and was deprived of its original ability, making it difficult for it to understand the Truth. The will departed from God, and evil filled our nature, making it easier for us to sin than to do good. This state is called *original sin*, and it incurs both physical death and the eternal destruction of the soul, which descends into Hades after death. And no one could deliver unhappy man from this eternal tragedy except the Creator Himself. For our nature had to be remade, the transgression destroyed, death conquered, and, most importantly, our communion with God restored. Who among men or all other creatures could have accomplished this?

And behold, in His mercy the Lord Himself intervened for His creation. Three obstacles stood before Him. The first of these was the gulf between the Divine and human natures. For it was said to Moses, *Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live* (Ex. 33:20).

How can a weak creation stand before the might of the Source of all power? Would it not be burned up like a moth in a flame? On the other hand, where is a person to find life unless he is united with the original Life?

The second obstacle was sin, which cannot go ignored by Holy God. For the righteous Creator cannot allow crime to go unpunished. On the other hand, there is no man that lives and does not sin; hence, all must be punished.

The third obstacle was death, which destroys man's nature. What is there to be said if all man's works are devoured by death? How can a mortal being commune with the Immortal unless his death has been destroyed?

And here the Lord Jesus Christ comes to destroy these obstacles, to save man, and to make him a god by grace. The Eternal Son descends from the heavens without being displaced, for He is God and fills all things. But as in the heavens the angels see Him and are completely subject to Him, so in His Birth He likewise becomes visible on earth. Christ takes flesh from the Virgin Mary, who by the power of the Life-creating Spirit was able to give birth to Him without the participation of a man.

The One Person of the Son of God begins to exist in two natures, united yet remaining *unmixed, unchanged, undivided, and inseparable*. Christ, remaining perfect God, became perfect man, having a human soul, mind, and will. He lacked only original sin, and He Himself committed no evil.

It was for this that the *immaculate conception* of Christ was necessary. For in an ordinary conception the ancient death is transmitted to each person, and people who come into being in this way cannot save others, as they themselves are in need of salvation. But when human nature was created in the womb of the Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, it proved capable of abiding in the Person of God the Son, so that from the very beginning human nature became Christ's own. In this manner through the *Divine Incarnation* the first obstacle was overcome: the difference in nature. Both essences were united in one Divine Person without destroying each other, and now through Christ we have gained access to the Father.

4. *And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.*

Christ came into the world and gave a new law, the law of love, but Christ's chief mission was to save us from evil and sin. For this, death was necessary, for life can only be bought with the price of death. To destroy the obstacle of sin, Jesus Christ voluntarily takes upon Himself the sins of all the world. The innocent Righteous One dies for the guilty, taking upon Himself their punishment and curse, that whosoever believes in Him might not perish, but might have Eternal Life. His Blood becomes the ransom for our sins. He gives blood for blood, soul for soul, body for body, and in this way God's truth is transfused into our hearts. *The chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed* (Is. 53:5).

As a man Christ offers Himself in sacrifice to God for our sins, and by this rite He sanctifies us, banishing sin from our heart and mind and from man's whole nature.

He corrects Adam's ancient disobedience by being obedient to the Father unto death, even the death of the cross—a disgraceful, terrible, tortuous



death. The Lord becomes the new Adam, the progenitor of redeemed mankind. As the first man introduced sin into the world, so Christ gave eternal life. Instead of the tree of knowledge—the Cross, which was transformed from an instrument of torture into the sign of our victory and salvation. The hands stretched forth to work iniquity are healed by the pierced hands of Jesus Christ. The feet that fled from God are returned to Him by the nails that pierced the feet of the God-man. And so God's Justice was manifested, for it was not simply God that conquered the enemy Satan, but man. The same nature that was taken into the captivity of sin in Paradise emerged victorious on the Cross.

By the words *under Pontius Pilate* the Church emphasizes that this event occurred at a specific point in history, during the time of Pontius Pilate, when the ancient prophecies concerning the coming of Shiloh, the Reconciler of God and men (Gen. 49:10), were fulfilled, and the ancient enmity between creation and the Creator ceased. Fulfilled were the expectations of the nations that formerly were estranged from the Lord by their iniquitous idol-worship and worship of evil spirits, and have now become His own through turning to the Crucified One, through faith in Jesus Christ.

We believe that Christ did not merely pretend to suffer, but actually endured terrible torments in order to deliver us from death. Naturally, this suffering affected only His human nature (the Divine nature cannot suffer).

He truly died and was buried. His Soul separated from His Body and descended into Hades. And Hades was destroyed by the appearance of the Divine brilliance. The righteous ones who believed in Christ ascended into Paradise, and since that time the path leading thereto, which had been closed by the transgression of the first men, has once again appeared. As for our ancient enemy, the devil, he was shackled and rendered powerless, as one who had unjustly raised his hand against the Creator. Thus the second obstacle between God and man, the wall of sin, collapsed, and thus the cause of everlasting death that held man fast disappeared.

5. *And arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

The apostle Peter said that death suffered the pangs of labor when it received Christ, for it could not retain Him (Acts 2:24). This is because death destroys man's integrity, or wholeness, for man is not merely an immortal soul, but a union of soul and body. But Christ is an omnipresent Divine Person; hence, though His soul was separated from His body, through His divinity the link between Jesus' soul and body remained. Consequently Christ's soul did not remain in Hades and was united once again with His body, which remained in the tomb incorrupt until its reunification with the soul. Thus the Lord



Jesus burst death from within, not permitting it to take possession of His Person.

Then, *on the third day*, i.e., on Sunday while it was yet night, when God created the world out of nonexistence, Christ *rose from the dead* by the power of His Divinity. His soul was reunited with His body for all time, so that it became insusceptible to corruption for all time.

The risen Jesus is the Firstborn of the dead, the Firstfruit, i.e., the first sheaf of the new harvest of those resurrected. Death was destroyed, and with the morning of Pascha world history reversed direction, beginning the process of resurrection from the dead. Thus the final obstacle between the Creator and man collapsed, and since that moment immortal God has been “charging” mankind with His immortality.

This was likewise foretold by the prophets of old, whose words have been preserved until our time in Holy Scripture, saying that death would be swallowed up by life, and in place of corruption mankind would be clothed in incorruption.

6. *And ascended into the heavens, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father.*

On the fortieth day after His Resurrection Christ ascended in the flesh into the Heavens, laying the path for us into the eternal Fatherland. Henceforth human nature abides in the uncreated ocean of Divinity, more exalted than the angelic flaming spirits — so great is the glory of redeemed mankind. Henceforth our life abides in the ascended Christ, and we await His return, since in Him alone will our new life be fully revealed.

The Lord Jesus sits *at the right hand of the Father*, and as a man participates in ruling the world. To this day He is the eternal High Priest, Who is ever alive, in order to intercede for us before the Father, to be the sole Mediator between God and man, and to destroy the sins of Christians by His Blood. He awaits the end of the preaching of the Church, which gathers all those who are saved into the Kingdom. When this mission is completed Christ will return again to the earth, and His enemies will be cast beneath His feet.

7. *And shall come again, with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.*

The Second Coming of the Lord Jesus will not be like the first. The Lord will come to earth this time not as Savior, but as the righteous Judge. First the Cross—the sign of His victory over death and sin—will shine over the world. A flame will go before the face of Jesus, altering the universe. The heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, the earth will dissolve in fire, and a new heaven and earth will appear, where truth abides. Christ will come in the glory of His Father, and all His angels with Him. At His word, to the sounding of the archangel’s trumpet, all the dead shall arise. All the living will be instantly transfigured. And so all mankind, from the first person even unto the last, will be gathered before His throne.

Then the Lord will render to each according to his deeds. The righteous will receive Eternal Life, and the sinners will be cast along with Satan into the eternal fire. Thus full justice will be restored. All good will be rewarded,

and evil punished. And neither bribes nor false witnesses will be of any help to the ungodly.

After the Judgment will begin the eternal Kingdom of Glory, which will never end. In it there will be neither death, nor sickness, nor sorrow, nor sin—only ever-increasing joy.

8. *And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life;  
Who proceedeth from the Father; Who with the Father  
and the Son together is worshipped and glorified;  
Who spake by the prophets.*

The Symbol of Faith goes on to teach us to believe also in the Third Person of God—the *Holy Spirit*. He is True God, a Person, not merely an energy, as some think. He is called *Holy*, being a sanctifying Power that makes all the saints, or holy ones, free of the world, permeating them with the power of God. The very word *holy* means “set apart from this world, supermundane,” and also “morally pure.”

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He is the *Lord* of creation, Who gave life to all that lives, and even now preserves it and brings it to perfection. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit gives us eternal life, and hence He is called the *Giver of Life*.

The Holy Spirit eternally *proceedeth from the Father*, from His essence, and this is His particular personal trait, which distinguishes Him from the Father and the Son. At the same time He is equal to Them. For this reason the Symbol of Faith says that *we worship and glorify the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son*. He is the Creator, and abides forever in the Son, and reveals Christ to us, and leads us to the Father through the Son. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the salvation that the Lord Jesus accomplished. He guides the Church that He Himself created when He descended in the form of tongues of fire upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

At the end of the world the Holy Spirit will transfigure creation and give life to all the dead. He is called the Comforter, for He comforts us in our sorrows and protects us from every misfortune.

Through Him we received Divine Revelation; hence it is said that He spoke through the prophets. He is the author of both the Bible and the Holy Tradition of the Church.

9. *In One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.*

The Church in which we believe is a mystical Body, the Body of Christ, the house of God, the new nation of the Father, redeemed by the Blood of Christ. The Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is made up of living people, and of those who have died in the faith, and angels—all united by the love of the Holy Spirit. Only to those who are members of the Church is salvation promised.

On earth the Church is an assembly of Christians united by the Orthodox faith, liturgical communion, submission to the hierarchy, and adherence to the Law of God. All heretics (those who distort Divine Revelation) and schismatics (those who have fallen away from the Church for reasons unrelated to the faith, such as questions of ritual or other matters) are outside her and have no salvation until they repent.

The Church is called *one* (i.e., the only one) because there is only one Church: there are no others. There is one Body of Christ, just as there is one Head of the Church, and one Holy Spirit. For God is one, and there is but one path to Him. And though there are various local churches (the Churches of Russia, Greece, Jerusalem, and others), they are not separate communities, but rather parts of the One Church.

She is *holy* because she sanctifies, making every Christian to be like God, whatever life he may have lived previously. The source of the Church's holiness is the Holy Spirit, which has lived in her since the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). Those who persist in doing evil are cut off from the Church, either visibly, through excommunication (like Leo Tolstoy or those who have converted to Islam or various sects) or by God's invisible judgment.

The Church is called *catholic*, i.e., universal or ecumenical, because she bears the light of salvation for all times and for all nations without exception. In her there are no nationalities, no social classes, and the power of God saves all that are in her of every sin, teaches them all the virtues, and contains the fullness of the Truth.

She is called *apostolic* because she is founded through the apostles (people sent by Christ to preach). And the gift of the Holy Spirit is transmitted in her unceasingly through the ordination of bishops and priests directly by the apostles, the disciples of Christ. In addition, to this day the Church fulfills the apostolic duty to preach the Gospel to all nations of the earth. When this mission is completed the end of the world will come.

#### 10. *I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.*

The chief source of power for the members of the Church is the sacraments, the first of which is baptism. The sacraments are special sacred rites established by God Himself, in which through external rites the grace of the transfiguring Holy Spirit is imparted to the believer. The grace-filled life of a Christian begins through a new birth of water and the Holy Spirit, through baptism for the remission of sins. It is performed through triple immersion into water while invoking the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here the person is washed of original sin and of all his own personal sins, reborn unto new life that proceeds from God Himself, and enters the Orthodox Church.

Baptism is performed once in a lifetime, as we can only be born once. To receive baptism one must have faith and repentance. However, our Church also baptizes infants according to the faith of their parents and sponsors or godparents, who promise to raise the newly-baptized in Orthodoxy. Then the person is given the personal gift of the Holy Spirit for the doing of good works. This is the second sacrament, chrismation, which is performed immediately after baptism.

The pinnacle of all the sacraments is Communion, when in the form of bread and wine an Orthodox Christian receives the Body and Blood of the Risen Jesus Christ unto the destruction of sin and participation in Life Eternal. The service at which this sacrament is performed is called the Liturgy (“common work”) or the Eucharist (“thanksgiving”).

If a person sins after baptism, the sin is forgiven him through the priest in the sacrament of repentance, or confession.

In cases of physical illness the Christian employs the sacrament of unction (blessed oil) unto the healing of soul and body or the granting of a painless repose.

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Marriage is sanctified in the sacrament of matrimony, when the husband becomes the image of Christ, and the wife—the image of the Church. Here they are given the strength for eternal love and Christian upbringing of children.

Finally, in the sacrament of the priesthood, or ordination, through the laying-on of the bishop’s hands grace is bestowed for service in the Church. When a deacon is ordained he receives the right to assist the priest at the divine services. The priest can perform all the sacraments except ordination. The bishop performs the sacraments, ordains, and also governs the local church, seeing to the purity of the faith and the morality of its members.

#### 11. *I look for the resurrection of the dead ...*

We await the resurrection of our bodies with hope; we know that the souls of all men are immortal. After death the righteous go to Paradise, where they abide in a certain (albeit incomplete) bliss and pray for all Christians yet living. This is why we invoke the prayerful aid of the saints as intercessors for us before God, and experience has shown that we frequently receive real, effectual aid from them.

Sinners and the unbaptized go to hades, where with dread they await punishment.<sup>10</sup> During this time the baptized may yet receive relief by the prayers of the Church.

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<sup>10</sup> *Editor’s note:* The Orthodox Church as a whole does not make absolute statements about the eternal fate of any person based solely on whether or not he was baptized.



Full restitution, however, will be accomplished on the Day of Judgment, when by the power of God's omnipotence through the gift of the Risen Savior all the dead will come to life; all will arise in the age of Christ. The bodies of people who have died will once again be united with their souls, and these bodies will perfectly reflect the state of the soul: the righteous will shine like the sun, while the sinners will be dark as night. And then eternity will begin, in which those risen will abide eternally in their bodies, for death will be no more.

12. *...and the life of the age to come. Amen.*

Sinners, as has been said above, will be cursed by God and cast into eternal fire along with the devil and his angels. There the unquenchable flame, outer darkness, and the undying worm await them, and their torments will never cease.

The righteous, however, will receive Life Eternal: they will look upon God and will receive greater knowledge, happiness, and delight from Him. The saints will reign together with Christ in the new universe, will be the friends of the angels, and will receive heavenly treasures. They will live in the New Jerusalem and will become gods by grace; the Holy Trinity will come to abide in them. And their bliss will continue for all unending eternity, ever increasing and strengthening through communion with the Everlasting Father.

Such is our brief commentary on the Symbol of Faith. Such is the faith of the Orthodox Church.

## WHO ARE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS?

We, being members of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit rightly preserving the faith given us by Jesus Christ, are called Orthodox Christians. As defined by St. John of the Ladder, "The Christian is one who imitates Christ in thought, word and deed, as far as is possible for human beings, believing rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity."<sup>11</sup>

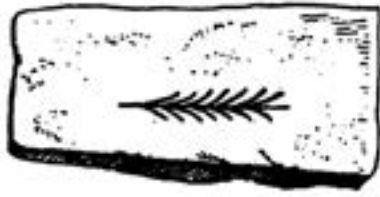
Those who, though they may believe in Jesus Christ, do not adhere to the original Divine Revelation and are not in unity with the Orthodox Church, are called heretics or schismatics. These include the Roman Catholics, Protestants, monophysites (the Armenian Gregorians), Old Believers, Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others.

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<sup>11</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, 4:4.

## Part II

# THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS



## FAITH AND WORKS

Without Orthodox faith one cannot be saved from eternal torments. Faith alone, however, is not sufficient to please God. As the apostle James said, *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also* (Jas. 2:26).

This is quite natural. For one who believes in a righteous God, if he is of sound mind, will take care not to work unrighteousness. One who believes in a loving God must avoid hatred, and belief in a Judge safeguards one from every evil.

Furthermore, for Christians the Lord is their loving Father and Savior; hence, it is natural for us also to show love for Him. Christ said, *If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings* (Jn. 14:23–24).

Thus, for a Christian keeping the commandments is not a moral obligation or some moral standard grounded in the assertion, “This is good because this is how it’s supposed to be.” For us, keeping the commandments is the condition for friendship between God and man, the pledge of love between the Creator and creation.



## WHAT ARE GOOD AND EVIL?

**W**hy then does God need for us to do this or that? What are good and evil? Christians believe that good is an attribute of God Himself. As St. Maximus the Confessor wrote, “the virtues exist without beginning,” for they are the uncreated energies of the Lord. Hence, everyone who does good according to the Lord’s will does so by God’s energies. And everyone who, by constantly doing good works, acquires all the virtues (good works that have become a habit) becomes like God, and achieves godlikeness.

Evil is violation of God's will, iniquity, abuse of the good properties of the nature God has created. Evil has no essence, and arises when the free will of a rational being abuses the gift of choice. Evil acts that become a habit are called *passions* (i.e., that which causes suffering and deprives a person of his freedom), and if the evildoer does not fight them they will corrupt his nature. For in the end sin produces death, both temporal and eternal. Naturally, the Creator does not wish that His creation perish, and it is for this reason that He forbids evil.

## VIRTUES AND GRACE

If virtue is a reflection of the Divine nature, obviously one cannot perform good works without the help of the Lord Himself. In the words of Christ the Savior, *without Me ye can do nothing* (Jn. 15:5).

The Head of the Orthodox Church, Christ, sends grace to its members, and through this grace we are able to perform even the greatest of works. Grace is the uncreated energy of God, given by the Holy Spirit through the sacraments by virtue of the redeeming sacrifice of Christ.

But grace cannot act unless the person himself has the desire. Hence the proverb, "God helps those who help themselves." A person who wishes to be saved must turn to grace for help, then do everything that depends solely on him. God will accept a person's every effort. According to St. Macarius the Great, the Lord accomplishes all works in us, then rewards us as though we had performed them ourselves. At the same time, Christ instructs us, *When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do* (Lk. 17:10).

And this is just, for it is not God who needs all good works, but we ourselves.

## THE CONSCIENCE

How then are we to know whether a given act is good or evil? Some say they decide for themselves what is good and what is evil. This approach is gravely mistaken, because the result is that a person may (and does) justify every kind of vileness. Furthermore, this approach is foolish because man did not create himself and his nature: he does not fully know himself, just as he does not know the future, and hence the rules that he makes for himself today may harm and even destroy him tomorrow.

Others say one must adhere to the dictates of society. But this too is no solution. For society is made up of these very people, and if one person does not know the future why should millions know it? Have not mobs justified massacres? Society then is incapable of teaching us good.

Thus, what we need is not a human gauge of good and evil. This is no surprise, considering that good is a reflection of the Divine Life. And the All-merciful Lord has given each person to hear His voice. This voice of God in a person, relayed through his guardian angel, is called the conscience.





The apostle Paul writes, *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another* (Rom. 2:14–15).

Every person has felt the voice of the conscience—depression and sorrow upon committing a sin, and peace of mind following a good work. If a person always heeds the voice of the conscience, believing rightly, he will be saved.

## THE NEED FOR GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

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Unfortunately, people frequently disobey the commands of the conscience, suppressing it with untruth, with the result that its voice becomes increasingly muffled. In the end the evildoer proves himself one of those *having their conscience seared with a hot iron* (1 Tim. 4:2). But even before a person reaches this terrible state (called spiritual death) the voice of the conscience is distorted within him, the heart is hardened, and the mind is darkened. The result is that he distorts even the faint echo of God's voice that does reach him, justifying evil and even thinking that he is pleasing God in so doing. In the words of the prophet Jeremiah, *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall* (Jer. 6:15).

So that this terrible sickness of spirit might not leave a person without direction, the Creator gave us not only the natural law—the conscience—but also the written Law, by which we may distinguish good from evil.

## THE TWO COMMANDMENTS OF LOVE

Our Lord Jesus Christ said that all the commandments of the Law may be summarized in these two: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* (Mt. 22:37–39).

According to the first commandment, love for God must permeate all our spiritual and physical powers. The second requires that we extend to our neighbors the love we have for ourselves. For we love ourselves even if we do wrong, and this must be our rule for how we treat everyone; i.e., we must love the person while hating his sin.

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: AN ALPHABET OF GOOD

In order to fully internalize Christ's commandments, however, one must first master the alphabet of holiness. This alphabet is the Ten Commandments, given by God through the prophet Moses on Mount Sinai and written by the finger of God upon two tablets (stone slabs). In the words of Irenaeus of Lyons, the Lord "prepares man for His friendship through the medium of the Decalogue, and likewise for agreement with his neighbour—matters which did certainly profit man himself; God, however, standing in no need of anything from man" (*Against Heresies*, 4, 16:3). Christians too must undergo this preliminary preparation, and know this alphabet, in order to achieve friendship with God.

We will cite here the commandments that *God spake [unto Moses]*:

**The 1st Commandment:** *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*

**The 2nd Commandment:** *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.*

**The 3rd Commandment:** *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

**The 4th Commandment:** *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*



**The 5th Commandment:** *Honour thy father and thy mother: [that it may be well with thee and] that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

**The 6th Commandment:** *Thou shalt not kill.*

**The 7th Commandment:** *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

**The 8th Commandment:** *Thou shalt not steal.*

**The 9th Commandment:** *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

**The 10th Commandment:** *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's (Ex. 20:1–17).*

Now we must examine these commandments in greater detail and see what the Creator requires of us.

## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

*I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*

In the words *I am the Lord thy God* the Creator shows Himself to be the source of the moral law. Hence, it is essential to come to know God, to learn from Him, to serve Him, and to praise Him in order to please Him.

One who wishes to know God must employ both mind and heart to this end. For as the Lord said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God* (Mt. 5:8). The mind must be immersed in studying the Lord's Revelation and reading the works of the saints. The will must exercise in the virtues, and the heart must abide in prayer, avoiding evil in every form. Then the Creator will reveal Himself to man and will become his God. As He Himself said, *But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word* (Is. 66:2).

In order to achieve constancy in knowledge of God one must have firm faith in God, fear of God, and remembrance of God, which is also called "walking before God."

*True faith* is established by reverent reading of the Bible, prayer, and listening to teachings about God in church.

*Fear of God* is fear of offending God by sin, reverence before the might of the Creator, fear of punishment, and fear of losing one's reward. The holy fathers distinguished various degrees of fear of God. St. John of the Ladder wrote, "Let us fear the Lord not less than we fear beasts. For I have seen men



who were going to steal and were not afraid of God, but, hearing the barking of dogs, they at once turned back; and what the fear of God could not achieve was done by the fear of animals.” St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) says that, “the walk toward Christ begins and ends under the guidance of the fear of God.”<sup>12</sup>

The apostle John said that *perfect love casteth out fear* (1 Jn. 4:18). But reverence before the Heavenly Father remains always. As St. Macarius the Great said, addressing God, “even when my soul is one with Thee, even then I know that Thou art the Lord, and I am a servant; Thou art the creator, and I am a creation.”

*Walking before God* is the constant, active remembrance that the omnipresent Lord sees all, hears all, knows all, and renders to each according to his deeds. King David thus described this wonderful virtue: *I beheld the Lord ever before me, for He is at my right hand, that I might not be shaken* (Ps. 15:8).

Led by this virtue, Enoch was taken up into the Heavens, Noah was saved from the flood, and Abraham became the father of those who believe.

<sup>12</sup> St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov), *Ascetic Experiences*, II. Homily on the Fear of God and the Love of God.

By preserving these virtues, worshiping and serving God, calling upon Him for aid, man comes to know the Creator, and through this attains life that is not subject to corruption.

However, just as fulfillment of the commandment gives life, so also violating it leads to destruction.

Who violates this first commandment? Those who deny the Lord's very existence: atheists. Scripture equates them to madmen: *The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God. They are become corrupt and loathsome in their ways; there is none that doeth good* (Ps. 13:1).

This commandment is also violated by polytheists, who instead of the Creator worship many gods that mask evil spirits; the unfaithful, who do not trust the Lord and reject His Revelation; apostates, who have renounced the true faith either out of fear or for worldly gain; and the superstitious, who instead of God trust in superstitions or old books, for example.

This commandment is also rejected by heretics, who distort the faith, and schismatics, who separate from the Orthodox Church for personal reasons.

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Especially terrible, however, is the sin of magic and sorcery, when people worship the powers of evil, the fallen angels, instead of the Creator. This is frequently called bioenergetics, faith healing, or extrasensory perception. But God's verdict is as follows: *Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God* (Lev. 19:31).

This commandment is also violated by those who, while formally Orthodox, either fall into despair, not believing that God is able to save them, or neglect going to church and praying in general, or love creation more than the Creator. Gluttons and people who trust in men are likewise in violation of it, and are "rewarded" for this with disillusionment in human nature. For in order to not become disillusioned one must not have illusions in the first place.

## The Second Commandment

*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.*

The Lord's second commandment likewise forbids venerating idols—false gods made of stone or wood, that can neither see, nor hear, nor speak. It is a great sin in the eyes of the Maker to erect these graven images, which

obscure the true God. As the ancient ecclesiastical teacher Tertullian said, “idol worship is the greatest crime of the world, the sole reason for the Last Judgment.”

Unfortunately, today the reemergence of paganism has shown how many people incur God's wrath by violating this commandment. This includes belief in horoscopes, and wearing amulets (many actually wear signs of the zodiac on their chest instead of the cross, which is idol worship). They also violate it who worship trees and stones, “energizing” themselves with them, “drawing on the cosmic energy.”

Many keep actual idols in their homes—statuettes of Buddha, shamanic masks, statues of ancient gods—and frequently even burn incense sticks before them, yet they consider themselves Christians. When visiting foreign countries tourists run straight to the pagan temples, spin the prayer drums, bow down before the idols, and think this is mere ritual. But all this is a mortal sin, a great crime against God Himself. According to the canons of the Church, one who has offered sacrifice to idols is no longer a Christian.

Another sin against this commandment is any participation in the religious rituals of non-Orthodox—heretical false sacraments, consuming food offered to idols or matzah.

In addition to outright idol worship, however, this commandment forbids worshipping one's passions—sinful habits that for many take the place of the Lord God.

This includes *gluttony*, when a person lives to eat. For these, says the apostle, *their God is their belly* (Phil. 3:19).

This includes *avarice*—attachment to money, which asserts that money can do anything.

It includes *drunkenness* and *drug addiction*, which make a person serve creation instead of the Creator, harming himself and those around him.

It is, ultimately, the grossest of man's sins—*vainglory* (the desire for temporary glory) and *pride*. The latter is frequently called a sense of self-worth, but one must remember the words of Scripture: *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* (1 Pet. 5:5).

In order not to fall into these sins one must fulfill the virtues. Gluttony is overcome by abstinence and fasting, avarice—by unacquisitiveness (inner independence from material possessions) and generosity, and pride and vain-glory—by humble-mindedness.

People frequently ask: do not the Orthodox violate this commandment in venerating the holy icons? The answer is a resounding “No!” For we do not consider the icons gods, we do not pay homage to them as divine, and we do not look to them for salvation. In venerating them we give honor to those depicted upon them, and strive to imitate their virtues. The veneration of icons was established by God Himself in Old Testament times in the same

book of Exodus where the Ten Commandments are found. The Lord commanded that cherubim of beaten work be made upon the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:18), and that cherubim be embroidered upon the veil before the ark (Ex. 26:31). Before them lamps were to be lit (Ex. 27:21), incense was to be burned (Ex. 30:6–7), and worship was to be offered (Josh. 7:6). This is precisely the manner in which icons are venerated in the Church to this day.

## The Third Commandment

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

By these words God demands that we pronounce with reverence His holy name, that verbal icon of the Creator, potent with the power of grace. Just as those who chopped up icons after the revolution did not go unpunished (in every village one can hear tales of what terrible punishments befell the despoilers of the churches—fires, madness, and sudden death), so also they who pronounce the Creator’s name carelessly, let alone blasphemously, will be punished.

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Blasphemers and committers of sacrilege (those who mock holy things and the words of Holy Scripture) will receive their punishment. We know from history that the heretic Nestorius, who blasphemed against the Theotokos, suffered rotting of the tongue; the antitheist Engels died of laryngeal cancer; and the “superman” Nietzsche lost his mind and died in a hospital.

However, this commandment is also violated by those who take God’s name in vain, i.e., who pronounce the most holy name of Jesus in idle conversation, to say nothing of shameful jokes, and those who murmur against God and His Providence, and those who pray inattentively, thinking about other things while conversing with God.

Finally, this commandment is broken by oath-breakers, breakers of vows made to God and those who swear falsely. All these works are displeasing to the Creator.

## The Fourth Commandment

*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them*

*is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

God commands that we labor honestly to His glory for six days, but that we dedicate the seventh day to the Creator. In the Old Testament this particular day of the Lord was Saturday, on which the faithful recalled the week of Creation and the Hebrews' deliverance from slavery to the Egyptians. To this day we continue to keep Saturday holy, though not in the same way as in times of old, for Christ freed us from literal adherence to the Old Testament laws. On this day the Church always performs the Sacrament of Holy Communion, strict fasting is prohibited (as on Sunday), and prostrations are suspended in the churches.

Today, however, the chief feast for us is Sunday. On this day God first created the world out of nonexistence, and on this same day He restored our perishing nature by His Resurrection. And in fulfillment of the words of Scripture, *This is the day which the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad therein* (Ps. 117:24), on Sunday we rejoice and are glad of Christ the Savior, the Conqueror of death.

In keeping with this commandment we always gather in the temple of God on Saturday evening and Sunday morning (the liturgical day begins in the evening, as this is when the creation of the universe began). After the Sunday service Christians refrain from work until evening, spending their time in studying the Word of God and doing good works. We may only labor on these days to help the poor, the orphans, the widows, the sick, or the Lord's temple, but by no means for ourselves.

Christians also celebrate other holidays, or feasts. The chief of these is *Pascha*,<sup>13</sup> followed by twelve main feasts:

**The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos**

September 8 on the Julian calendar (old style)/September 21 on the  
Gregorian calendar (new style).

**The Elevation of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord**

September 14/27

**The Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple**

November 21/December 4

**The Nativity of Christ (Christmas)**

December 25/January 7

**The Theophany (Epiphany) of the Lord<sup>14</sup>**

January 6/19

<sup>13</sup> The word *Pascha* is Hebrew, meaning "Passover," and in Christianity refers to the feast of the Lord's Resurrection, called Easter in the West. — *Trans.*

<sup>14</sup> The feast of the Lord's Baptism. — *Trans.*

The Meeting of the Lord

February 2/15

The Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos

March 25/April 7

The Transfiguration of the Lord

August 6/19

The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos<sup>15</sup>

August 15/28

The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem

one week before Pascha

The Ascension of the Lord

forty days after Pascha

Pentecost, the Day of the Holy Trinity

(the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles)

fifty days after Pascha

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In addition to the feasts, this commandment orders that we observe the fasts established by the Church, as Christ taught by both word and example. Fasting helps to overcome the devil, intensifies prayer, and enables one to control one's heart. During the fasts one must refrain from meat and dairy products (during strict fasts fish is also prohibited), as well as gluttony and drunkenness (which of course are impermissible at any time). By mutual consent marital relations are also suspended during this time. During the fast one must refrain from idle entertainments, instead abiding in prayer, reading the Bible, and increasing works of charity. Naturally, the fasts do not apply to the sick, women who are pregnant or nursing, those in the army or in captivity, and travelers. These fast as they are able.

The Church has four major, multi-day fasts, as well as one-day fasts.

Multi-day fasts:

*Great Lent* begins seven weeks before Pascha and ends on the night of Pascha.

*The Saints Peter and Paul Fast* (or Apostles Fast) begins a week after Pentecost, and lasts until the feast of the apostles Peter and Paul (June 29/July 12).

*The Dormition Fast* begins on August 1/14 and ends on the day of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos (August 15/28).

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<sup>15</sup> The feast of the repose of the Mother of God—*Trans*.



The *Nativity Fast* (or St. Philip's Fast) begins on November 15/28 and lasts until the Nativity of Christ (December 25/January 7).

The one-day fasts are, first and foremost, Wednesday and Friday throughout the entire year (except for Bright Week—the week after Pascha; Trinity Week—the week after Pentecost; Christmastide—the period from Nativity to Theophany; the Week of the Publican and the Pharisee—the third week before Great Lent; and Cheesefare Week—the week before Great Lent. On Wednesday and Friday Christians fast, fulfilling the words of Christ: *But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day* (Mk. 2:20).

Remembering Judas' betrayal of the Lord we fast on Wednesday, while on Friday we lament the Lord's Crucifixion. According to the Apostolic Canons, whoever does not fast on Wednesday and Friday and during Great Lent without a compelling reason is excommunicated from the Church.

Other one-day fasts include: the day of the Exaltation of the Lord's Cross (September 14/27), which is also a day of remembrance of the Crucifixion; the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner (August 29/September 1); and Theophany Eve (January 5/18).

Such are the requirements of the fourth commandment.

Naturally, violating these requirements is a sin. Other sins against the fourth commandment include slacking at work, working on feasts, breaking the fasts, and spending feast days in unholy activities, such as drunkenness and debauchery. For the Bible says, *Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death* (Ex. 31:14–15).

Today, however, we may observe another terrible sin against this commandment: celebration of feasts of the devil—various pagan holidays—in place of or in conjunction with the days of God. This includes celebration of the Chinese New Year, participating in Neptune's Day, and various holidays of other religions. This also includes numerous pagan rituals such as burning winter in effigy at the close of Cheesefare Week and observing Oriental traditions on New Year's Day. All these actions comprise the grossest antitheism and are a grave sin against the Creator. The early Christians went to death rather than do things their descendants do without a qualm. According to the church canons, those who do these things are barred from Communion for six years! If a person does not repent of these evil deeds, his lot is with the idol-worshippers.

## The Fifth Commandment

*Honour thy father and thy mother: [that it may be well with thee and] that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

The fifth commandment requires that one respect one's parents, regardless of their behavior, as the ones who gave us life through God. One must obey them in everything that is not contrary to God's will. Insulting one's parents, let alone striking them, is punishable by death (Ex. 21:15–17). Conversely, whoever honors those through whom he has received life receives the gift of length of days from the Creator. There are many examples of how obedient children lived to a ripe old age, while the disobedient either died in tragic accidents, or took to drink, or fell prey to terrible illnesses. Frequently God has punished them in that their own children treated them as badly or worse than they treated their own parents.

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Great is the power of parents' prayers. As the Russian proverb says, "a mother's prayer can raise one up from the ocean floor," and this is the truth. Once St. Gregory the Theologian, while yet unbaptized, was caught in a terrible storm on the sea. His parents saw their son's plight in a vision and began to pray to God. Then one of Gregory's traveling companions saw Gregory's mother, St. Nonna, come to them across the sea and drag their submerged ship out of the abyss. Immediately the storm was quelled, and the ship reached port safely.<sup>16</sup>

No less powerful is a parent's curse. In the 19th century there was an incident when, during reconstruction of a cemetery church, a coffin was found containing a blackened, undecayed corpse that was clutching a woman's braid. It turned out to be the son of an old woman who lived nearby. He had died forty years before, but his mother was still living. She related the terrible story of how her son had routinely abused and beaten her, and once in a fit of hatred had torn out her braid by the roots. At this in desperation the woman took the hair and bound his hands with it, pronouncing a curse. He immediately died, and as no one could tear his mother's braid from his hands he was buried with it. Only when his mother forgave him did the corpse of her cursed son disintegrate, and it was received by the earth.

This commandment also concerns respect for the government. Concerning this God says, *Thou shalt not revile the gods* (i.e., the judges), *nor curse the ruler of thy people* (Ex. 22:28).

We know that the institution of government was established by the Creator; otherwise, according to St. Basil the Great, "people would de-

<sup>16</sup> The Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox Calendar, by St. Demetrius of Rostov, for January 25 (old style).

your one another as the fish.” The rulers’ task is to ensure justice, punishing evil and encouraging good. This, incidentally, is why at the Judgment more will be required from the rulers than from ordinary men, for the Lord does not respect persons and will render to each according to his deeds. Concerning this Holy Scripture says, *Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed: To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?* (Is. 10:1–3).

We for our part must pray for the government and help them not to contradict God’s will. This respect must be extended to one’s superiors at work, for we must work not for men, but for God, knowing that if we labor honestly we will receive a reward for this in the Heavens.

This commandment requires that we honor the priests as servants of God, as bearers of His grace who beget and raise up Christians in the life of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you* (Heb. 13:17).

Finally, the Word of God commands that we honor those older than we, as Scripture says: *Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God* (Lev. 19:32).

## The Sixth Commandment

### *Thou shalt not kill.*

God is Eternal Life and the Source of life, and hence He naturally forbids us to take away the gift that He has given and that He alone can take away. As nearly everyone acknowledges, murder is a great sin, incurring the eternal death of the unrepentant sinner. This crime includes not only the murder of an adult, but also abortion. For a human being becomes an immortal person from the moment of his conception! Imagine: those who kill their children (a mortal sin of which not only the wives are guilty, but also their husbands who have given their consent, and, of course, the doctors) or who push the agenda of infanticide—what answer will they be able to give to those whom they killed when they meet them? For meet them they most certainly shall, and they will be judged at God’s Judgment, where rationalizations such as “Why breed more poverty?” will be of no help whatsoever.

The sin of murder is also committed by those judges who punish the innocent and release the guilty. This is a terrible crime before the Almighty!

Those who allow a person to die and do not save him from death also sin—for example, a rich man who sees a poor man dying. Murderers also include those who burden their subordinates beyond their ability, harming their health, and especially those who withhold their salaries or refuse to pay them at all. The Word of God forbids withholding salaries even until the following morning (Lev. 19:13).

This sin, so widespread in our time, is one of the most terrible. Of such offenders Scripture says, *Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth* (Jas. 5:3–4).

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Particularly vile are offenses committed against the weak. Almighty God commands, *Thou shalt neither vex a stranger [in our terms, a refugee], nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto Me, I will surely hear their cry; And My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless* (Ex. 22:21–24).

This commandment is also broken by those who contribute to the breakdown of society by their vices. This includes drunkards, drug addicts, and smokers. The most terrible sin, however, is suicide—the only unforgivable sin (for after suicide repentance is impossible). There is not and cannot be any justification for this lawless act. Suicide is the fruit of despair and the loss of all hope in God's mercy. Unless the suicide was previously diagnosed as insane, he cannot be given a church funeral, buried on sacred ground (e.g., a blessed cemetery), or commemorated on slips for the departed.

This commandment also forbids hatred, anger, strife, and quarrelling. The Lord said, *Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Mt. 5:21–24).

Murderers include those who seduce a person to sin. They destroy what is most valuable in a person—his soul, and frequently his body as well. Of

these Christ said, *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea* (Mt. 18:6).

Here we should note that inflicting death in war or in executing a criminal is not murder. This is fulfilling the Lord's command regarding rulers, of whom it is said: *he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil* (Rom. 13:4). This by no means implies, however, that all is permissible in war. One may not kill prisoners or the unarmed, nor may one carry out an order that is against the will of the Creator. Immediately after the Great Flood, God commanded, *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man* (Gen. 9:6).

The sixth commandment is not only prohibitive, but also commands that one see to the health and wellbeing of his neighbor, and this is manifested through helping the poor, ministering to the sick, comforting the sorrowful and despondent, forgiving offenses, and praying for one's enemies. The virtues required by this commandment are meekness, patience, and love. It should be noted that, contrary to the opinion of the atheists, meekness is by no means synonymous with weakness. Moreover, it is the meek who are stronger than those who are easily angered, for the former have the power not only to become angry, but also to bridle their anger, while the latter are broken, lacking the power to bridle it. With good reason Christ says it is the meek who will inherit the earth (Mt. 5:5).

## The Seventh Commandment

### *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

This commandment prohibits all sexual dissoluteness. God does not wish to allow His gift of love to be trampled in animalistic relations; hence, adultery (infidelity to one's spouse), fornication (physical relations between unmarried people), unnatural sins (such as homosexuality and masturbation), and incest (physical relations between relatives) are forbidden. All this is a great evil in God's eyes. For one who couples with a harlot becomes of one body with her for all time, and through her with all debauchers throughout the universe. Hence the term *to cornute* (i.e., put horns on) a person—a clear indicator that a fornicator becomes enslaved to the devil and drives the Holy Spirit away from him.

Christ adds to this, *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. ... It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, sav-*

*ing for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery* (Mt. 5:27–28, 31–32).

Not only physical intercourse, but also anything leading to it is prohibited. In other words, all impurity of soul produced by lax behavior, listening to and watching unchaste spectacles, and reading impure books must be far removed from Christians. For debauchery not only angers God, but also decays a person's very nature. A certain Greek tyrant once came to a colleague and asked, "How can I ensure that a rebellion will not be raised against me?" The latter replied, "Lead the most intelligent and influential citizens to harlots, and they will cease to be a threat to you."

On the contrary, the Orthodox must be pure in soul and body, and then they shall see God (Mt. 5:8). The path to this is the virtue of chastity, which presumes inner integrity of a person's soul and body. The beginning of this is conjugal love, fidelity, and purity, and its perfection is the supernatural virtue of virginity.

## The Eighth Commandment

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*Thou shalt not steal.*

This commandment prohibits attempting to appropriate what belongs to one's neighbor. The truth is that the true Lord and Master of the universe is He Who created it. Heaven, the earth, and all that is therein belong to Him by right as their Creator. *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts* (Hag. 2:8). From Him proceeds all dominion on earth; thus, the thief appropriates not merely the property of another, but God's sovereign authority, rejecting His providence. Hence, every theft is rebellion against the Creator. Strictly speaking, the fall of the first people into sin already held an element of theft. This rebellion is grounded in mercenariness, and also envy, which is frequently used as an excuse for this lawlessness.

Naturally, God's punishment will not be long in coming. As King Solomon said, *So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof* (Prov. 1:19). And again, *He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live* (Prov. 15:27). A Greek proverb, grounded in centuries of experience, states: "The fastest and surer path to poverty is to steal and to work on Sundays." And this is truly so. Though the thief is often quick to make a profit, he is just as quick to squander it. The result is that poverty and sometimes a violent death await him. Let us therefore heed God: *Set not your hopes on injustice, and lust not after plunder; if riches flow in, set not your hearts thereon* (Ps. 61:11).

A repentant sinner is obligated to restore what was stolen and even add to it, for until this is done his sin will not be forgiven by God. After this he must not steal again, as the apostle says: *Let him that stole steal no more: but*

*rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth* (Eph. 4:28).

This command of the Creator is also violated by those involved in robbery. For the Bible says that the robber's life is not under God's protection: *If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him* (Ex. 22:2–3).

The difference lies in that at night it is impossible to ascertain the degree of the threat. During the day, if the thief is unarmed he should not be killed, but should be turned over to the authorities. In cases of violent robbery, resistance, even if the robber is killed in the process, is not a sin. According to the church canons, a robber who dies in a robbery may not be given a funeral, commemorated with the departed, or buried on sacred ground.

Another sin against this commandment is deceit. This includes counterfeiting, extortion, and fraud. Those who sell goods of poor quality or use inaccurate scales sin gravely against this commandment. God commands: *Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small. Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measures, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God* (Deut. 25:13–16).

They also sin who lend money at interest, for a profit: the wrath of Almighty God will wipe these ungodly ones off the earth. Those who alter the value of money likewise work great wickedness (Amos 8:5), as do those who take advantage of others' adverse circumstances to inflate prices.

They sin greatly who accept bribes for distorting justice and who extort money from people for merely performing the duties of their post. Slackers who accept payment for what they have not done are also thieves, as are they who borrow money and do not repay it.

Particularly grave are the sins of sacrilege, i.e., appropriation of what is consecrated to God and the Church, and simony—obtaining a clerical rank for money or through connections. This latter sin takes its name from Simon Magus, who attempted to purchase the episcopal rank for money and was cursed for this by the apostle Peter (Acts 8:9–24).

In place of these sins we must cultivate in ourselves the fragrant virtues of unselfishness, fidelity, justice, and compassion for the poor. If anyone desires to achieve perfection in the fulfillment of this commandment, he may achieve the supreme virtue of perfect nonpossessiveness. As Christ said, *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me* (Mt. 19:21).



## The Ninth Commandment

*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

This commandment forbids giving false testimony and lying in general. The reason for this, I believe, is perfectly clear. If our God is Truth (Jer. 10:10), then naturally all that is contrary to the truth is hateful to God. The Bible says, *Let the Lord destroy all deceitful lips* (Ps. 11:4). And whereas He is the Father to those who serve the Creator in truth, liars have their own parent. Christ said that the devil is *a liar and the father of lies* (Jn. 8:44); hence, liars will be with the devil in eternity. This pertains not only to lies that inflict evil on one's neighbor, but also to every kind of untruth. As the apostle Paul said, *putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another* (Eph. 4:25).

50 | The ninth commandment is violated very frequently in our time. Nearly everyone believes lying to be permissible for him. There is even a theory that a lie can serve for a person's salvation. But hear how the Lord sees all those who speak lies: *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil* (Mt. 5:33–37).

The violators of this commandment are, first and foremost, false witnesses who testify falsely in court, and those who falsely inform on or lodge complaints against others. For the judgment is God's (Deut. 1:17); hence, lying in court is an extreme evil. According to God's commandment, a false witness must suffer the punishment he intended against his neighbor (Deut. 19:18–19).

Another sin is slandering a person. Slander has been the downfall of many righteous men. It was through slander that Joseph was thrown into prison, and John Chrysostom was driven from his episcopal see, and thousands of new martyrs went to their deaths. Will God really leave a slanderer unpunished? Naturally not. There have been many instances when the Lord has turned slander against the slanderers themselves. Frequently slanderers die in terrible torment, betrayed by their children and rejected by their friends. And after their death they are met by evil angels and cast down to the bottom of the pit, to the original slanderer—the devil. For his name literally means “slanderer.”



John of the Ladder tells of the abbot of one monastery who, when he learned that one monk had slandered another, promptly drove him out without mercy, saying, “One slanderer here, the devil, is quite enough.”<sup>17</sup>

The Gospel forbids not only lying and slander, but even criticizing others for real vices, unless our post or clerical rank gives us this authority.

*Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye* (Mt. 7:1–5).

If someone attempts to involve us in judging another, we must not listen silently, let alone agree. Rather, as St. John advises, we must answer: “‘Stop, brother! I fall into graver sins every day, so how can I criticize him?’ In this way you will achieve two things: you will heal yourself and your neighbour

<sup>17</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, 4:14.

with one plaster. This is one of the shortest ways to the forgiveness of sins; I mean, not to judge. 'Judge not, that you be not judged.'"<sup>18</sup>

There is a story of one monk who lived a very lax life, and when he died the abbot of the monastery presumed that he had perished for all eternity. He prayed to God that He would reveal to him the fate of the deceased, and once in a vision he saw the monk in Paradise. He was amazed, and asked him, "How were you able to be saved when your life was so lax?" To this the monk replied, "If God had judged me I would naturally have perished. But in this life I never once judged anyone, and the Lord kept His promise: *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged* (Lk. 6:37). Hence He saved me."

To avoid falling into sin one must bridle one's tongue. As the apostle James said, *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. ... If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body* (Jas. 1:26, 3:2). Consequently, everyone who is able to govern his tongue is truly free and filled with the nobility of Christ.

## The Tenth Commandment

*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*

The last of the Ten Commandments forbids not outward actions, but their cause: evil desires. And this is understandable, since but for evil desires there would be no crime. Would the murderer really go and kill if he had not become angry? Would people really fall into adultery had they not been seized with lust? The Lord said, *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man* (Mt. 15:18–20).

Hence it is essential, as Solomon says, to *keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life* (Prov. 4:23). For if the spring of your life is poisoned, that poison will flow through you unobstructed, and how then can you be cured? Hence, the Christian must cleanse himself of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1).

The chief passion addressed in this commandment, however, is envy, which St. Basil the Great defines as "sorrow at the success of one's neighbor. Hence the envious man never wants for sorrows or afflictions" (Talk 11, *On Envy*). For whatever the envious person may possess, it is never enough for

<sup>18</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, 10:7.

him. Rightly does Scripture forbid eating with and befriending the envious (Prov. 23:6), for friendship intensifies this passion. According to the excellent description of St. Basil, “envious people may be recognized to a degree by their very faces. Their eyes are sunken, their eyebrows are lowered, their soul is troubled by the passion, their judgments of things are erroneous. No act, no power of speech adorned with importance and pleasantness, nor anything else worthy of emulation and attention do they find praiseworthy or virtuous ... the envious care neither for spotlessness of life nor greatness of merit, and attack only what is rotten.”<sup>19</sup>

Envy is the cause of general destruction, for through the envy of the devil death came into the world. Out of envy Cain killed Abel; out of envy the Jews killed Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, today violating the tenth commandment is all but considered a virtue. What people once disdained as envy is now given the proud name of “seeking equality” or “the quest for social justice.” People are incensed at the cars, apartments, and houses of others, and they wonder: why does he have all that and I do not? Yet this is a direct violation of the will of the Almighty!

A Christian must be satisfied with what he has. According to the apostle Paul, *godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content* (1 Tim. 6:6–8). The terrible passion of envy must be overcome by care for others—rejoicing in the virtues of one’s neighbor, and at times striving simultaneously to surpass in virtue the one whom you envy. This contest is truly wonderful, and it is for this that man was endowed with the spirit of competition.

*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep* (Rom. 12:15), the apostle commands. And cleanse your heart through frequent calling upon the sweetest name of Jesus, making your heart a place for God, like unto *a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness* (Ex. 24:10).

## LANDMARKS

Such are the commandments, by fulfilling which we can learn the will of God. Besides knowing the letters of the alphabet, however, one must know how to use them properly. One must know, if you will, spiritual grammar and syntax. The Ten Commandments are the foundation of the building of holiness; but while a house cannot be built without a foundation, this foundation

<sup>19</sup> St. Basil the Great, Talk 11.

alone is not enough. For the house of our salvation is built not for us, but for the Holy Trinity, as it is said, *I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God* (2 Cor. 6:16). Again, Christ said: *If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him* (Jn. 14:23).

In order to build a house one must have a blueprint, a well-organized work crew, and building materials. The same is true in building the house of God. The blueprint is the Orthodox faith, the foundation is the Ten Commandments, the builders are the Holy Spirit and we ourselves, acting in love (Eph. 2:22), and the building materials are the Commandments of Beatitude, which raise us up to the heights of Heaven.

Before describing in brief what “building materials” should be used, let us say a few words about organizing the “construction.”

## THE LADDER TO HEAVEN

54

**I**n ancient times the patriarch Jacob, while fleeing from his brother Esau to Haran, fell asleep in a place called Bethel. There he saw a wondrous dream, in which he beheld *a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven* (Gen. 28:12–17).

Thus this saint of old first saw the ladder leading to heaven, at the top of which stands the Lord. Later many others saw this ladder and left us descriptions of it. Thus, the holy martyr Perpetua (commemorated February 1) saw a golden ladder flanked on either side by every kind of edged weapon, which for this reason could be ascended only by constantly looking up.

The most detailed description of how to ascend this ladder, however, was left us by John the Sinaite in his celebrated work *The Ladder*, which every Orthodox Christians must read.

Holy Scripture gives a brief description of the process of the climb in three excerpts, which we will now examine before moving on to an account of the Commandments of Beatitude.

Here is what St. James says in his epistle: *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing* (Jas. 1:2–4).

The Second Epistle of Peter: *According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ* (2 Pet. 1:3–8).

Finally, the third passage comes from the apostle Paul: *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us* (Rom. 5:1–5).

We see that all three apostles are perfectly in agreement in their description of Christian life. It has its beginning in faith that unquestioningly accepts Divine Revelation, rejects sin, and through this draws to us the justifying power of God, His grace bestowed through the sacraments. Then, after the grace initially bestowed, God sends us *temptations* and *sorrows*. For these, according to Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria, “are the strongest bonds and the restoration of love and contrition ... for without labors one cannot receive crowns either in the world or from God.” As a reward for good God gives us the ability to perform things still more difficult, that our reward might be increased.<sup>20</sup>

The sincere believer learns to bear all these sorrows with *patience*, understanding that everything that happens to him is necessary either as a punishment for sin or as a test of his faith. He becomes firm in the inner conviction: “Though I may die, I will not sin.” A person must add to this all the *virtues*, not making the excuse that he has so many temptations that he has no time for doing good works, as some say.

<sup>20</sup> Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria, *Commentary on the Epistle of James*.





Thus we will come to a knowledge of the hidden mysteries of Divine Providence and see for ourselves the degree to which life in faith is “sweet, calming, gladdening, and blessed, despite minor outward difficulties and sorrows ... the patience that keeps [the righteous man] on the path of faith lets him taste this, working skill in him ... which in another place the apostle defined as having senses trained in every good.”<sup>21</sup> In living by faith a person becomes *discerning* and *experienced* in the truest sense, and not in the worldly sense. Furthermore, the person learns *restraint*, which is essential so that he does not become proud of the greatness of the gifts he has received. After restraint follows *patience*, for the passions do not leave a person until the day of his death, and patience is needed to make firm the gift received.

Experienced, heartfelt tasting of the sweetness of this life born of patience leads to a kindling of *hope*, sown at the moment a person receives the faith. The Christian understands not with his mind only, but also with his heart, that if life by faith here provides sweetness that the world itself cannot contain, it awaits us all the more in the Kingdom of the Father. In him is ignited *reverence* toward God, which, brimming over, manifests itself as *brotherly love*.

The pinnacle of this wonderful shining path is the gift of *love*, which is poured out from men’s hearts and established in God by faith and by the

<sup>21</sup> Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*.



Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Indeed, our hope is not put to shame, because our God Who is devoid of envy generously pours out upon such hearts His endless gift of love, the greatest of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In the words of the apostle Paul it may be defined thus: *Charity [i.e., love] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth* (1 Cor. 13:4–8).

Such is our brief description of the process of building the spiritual temple of God inside our hearts. We will now discuss the spiritual stones of which it is built.

## THE COMMANDMENTS OF BEATITUDE

Unlike the Ten Commandments, given by God on Sinai amid fire and tempest, the Commandments of Beatitude were not given as a severe command. Jesus Christ gave them to His disciples while preaching on a mountain beside the lake of Galilee (Mt. 5:1–12).

57

Our most-meekest Lord calls blessed, i.e., happy or fortunate, those who voluntarily keep them. Blessedness, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, is produced by participation in the blessedness of God Himself, Who is “pure Life, ineffable and incomprehensible Good, inexpressible Beauty, the springing forth of Grace, Wisdom, and Power, true Light, the Source of all goodness, surpassing all Authority; the only gracious, ever unchanging, unceasing joy; eternal gladness, of which if one were to say all he were able he would have said nothing worth saying” (*On the Beatitudes*, 1).

So great is the importance of these commandments that the Church reminds us of them at the Liturgy.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Happy are they who consider nothing their own, who know that all they have actually belongs to God. Happy are the *humble*, who know their unworthiness and weakness before the face of God Almighty. “As pride is the source of all impurity, so humility is the beginning of all piety” (John Chrysostom, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew*, 15:2). To the humble belongs the Kingdom of Heaven, destined for man from before time began. It belongs to him here as a pledge given in faith and hope, and in the future—in its fullness. For as the church hymn says, “they that overcome are raised up from hence.”

*Blessed are they that mourn:  
for they shall be comforted.*

Happy are they who mourn for their sins, and they who languish in the shadows of this mortal earth, striving to ascend to their Heavenly Fatherland. Naturally, this does not refer to tears shed over the loss of relatives or property, much less over a chopped onion. This kind of mourning is not only not blessed, but can even destroy a person, for, as the apostle said, *the sorrow of the world worketh death* (2 Cor. 7:10). Those who mourn with “joyful mourning” (as the Church calls this virtue) will be comforted with the gift of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. On earth they are comforted by forgiveness of sins, peace of conscience, and a perceptible fragrance, while after the world’s end *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes* (Rev. 7:17).

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

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Happy are those who have overcome anger, who have achieved profound inner peace, who become angry only when they ought, i.e., when someone wishes to separate them from God. They shall inherit both the land of the living (Ps. 26:13), i.e., eternal Paradise, and this earth itself. How clearly this is seen in Christians, whom the pagans ought to have destroyed, yet perished themselves in their iniquities, while the Christians gained possession of the world.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:  
for they shall be filled.*

Happy are they who, while doing good works, hunger and thirst to receive righteousness according to their faith in Jesus Christ. They do not trust in their good works, but in God alone, who gives righteousness to those who believe in the Lord’s sacrifice. As a hungry person seeks food, or a person whose mouth is parched seeks water, so also these seek prayer and strive to obtain salvation with a desire that is manifested in the virtues. They say together with David, *As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God* (Ps. 41:1). And their reward will be eternal satiation with the contemplation of God. *They shall be drunken with the fatness of Thy house, [O God,] and of the torrent of Thy delight shalt Thou make them to drink. For in Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light shall we see light* (Ps. 35:9–10).

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

Blessed are those who are merciful to those in need. This includes those who feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, and those who comfort the suffering, clothe the poor, take in strangers, and bury the dead. The merciful are also those who lead back from the paths of evil those who have

gone astray, who teach the ignorant to do good, who give timely advice, and who pray for their neighbors. As a reward for this they will obtain mercy, i.e., will be pardoned, by the merciful God both on earth and on the dread Day of Judgment.

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

Happy are they who through sincerity and prayer have achieved purity of heart. A pure heart is freedom from every evil thought, particularly thoughts of fornication, and complete self-control, achieved by constant vigilance over the state of one's spirit. A purified heart is the washed, clear eye of the soul, with which we can gaze like the eagles upon the Eternal Sun—the brilliant face of God. And only one who has been purified in body and soul is able to understand Scripture correctly.

*Blessed are the peacemakers:  
for they shall be called the children of God.*

Happy are those who, devoid of malice and hatred, reconcile those at enmity with each other. A particular reward is prepared for those who reconcile ungodly men with God, turning the enemies of God to Christ by their teaching. These become the sons of God, for they act like the Son of God, Who reconciled God and men, and Who united mankind with the angels.

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*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Happy are those who are persecuted for their faithfulness to good, for defending others who are oppressed, and for piety. Thus John the Baptist achieved blessedness, for he was executed for his faithfulness to the truth, not fearing to rebuke the wicked king. In exchange for earthly gifts forfeited they will receive as their inheritance the Kingdom of Heaven and innumerable riches, which can be neither stolen nor corrupted.

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,  
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake.  
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:  
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Finally, happy are they who are faithful to Christ to the point of death. He will give them a crown of life and will set them to reign together with Him. Blessed are the martyrs who are persecuted, reviled, tortured, slandered, and executed for the sake of the sweetest name of Christ. Their reward is so great that words cannot begin to describe it. The apostle John saw that they already abide beneath the heavenly altar, robed in the vesture of conquerors (Rev. 6:9–11). Their eternal reward beyond the bounds of this world defies all

imagination. Scripture says, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them* (Rev. 14:13).

## THE PURPOSE OF GOOD WORKS

Such are the Commandments of Beatitude, those precious stones from which we must build ourselves an eternal habitation. We must remember what matters most: the goal of Christian life lies not in the mechanical accumulation of good works, but in the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and it is for this that we need faith, good works, and prayer, which we are about to discuss. This is the goal of our baptism, for it is said, *And ye shall be holy unto Me: for I the Lord am holy* (Lev. 20:26).

This is the command of God Almighty. Let us fulfill His good will, and we will receive life from Him life in abundance.



## Part III

# PRAYER



### WHAT IS PRAYER?

61

As we have said above, the virtues are, in essence, a reflection of the properties of God Himself in the created world. Given this, they cannot be properly fulfilled without the help of the Creator. And how is one to obtain this help if one does not ask it? This explains the need for prayer.

What exactly is prayer? One of the greatest men of prayer in Orthodoxy, St. John of the Ladder, defines this virtue as follows: “Prayer by reason of its nature is the converse and union of man with God, and by reason of its action upholds the world and brings about reconciliation with God; it is the mother and also the daughter of tears [the mother because the person praying begins to see his own sins, producing mourning, and the daughter because mourning intensifies prayer and purifies it of all superfluous thoughts—*Auth.*], the propitiation for sins, a bridge over temptations, a wall against afflictions, a crushing of conflicts, work of angels, food of all the spiritual beings, future gladness, boundless activity, the spring of virtues, the source of graces, invisible progress, food of the soul, the enlightening of the mind, an axe for despair, a demonstration of hope, the annulling of sorrow, the wealth of monks, the treasure of solitaries, the reduction of anger, the mirror of progress, the realization of success, a proof of one’s condition, a revelation of the future, a sign of glory.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> St. John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, 28:1.

Given this significance of prayer, the place it holds in the life of a Christian is no surprise. The commandment of the apostle Paul requires unceasing prayer: *Pray unceasingly* (1 Thess. 5:17).

Each act of a Christian must be accompanied by prayer. Each day begins with prayer and ends with the same. Before and after meals, before undertaking every good work and upon its completion, we pray to the Lord. Ideally, prayer must become as natural to us as breathing; it will accompany us even beyond the bounds of this world.

## TYPES OF PRAYER

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Naturally, there are various kinds of prayer for various events in life. The simplest and most widespread form of prayer is *supplicatory prayer*. Christ promised, *Whatever you ask [the Father] in My name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in My name, I will do it* (Jn. 14:13–14). These are not empty words. Christians know from personal experience that God helps those who turn to Him. We ask for forgiveness of sins, and help in the virtues, and resolution of the issues that arise daily, for nothing is impossible for God.

But one must ask with prayer, never doubting that God has the power to grant what is asked. Otherwise the Lord will not deign to respond to one who is double-minded, for *he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord* (Jas. 1:6–7).

The following story illustrates how God hears those who call upon Him.

“Once Abba Dula and Abba Vissarion were walking along the seashore. Abba Dula said to Vissarion, ‘Abba, I am thirsty.’

“Abba Vissarion made the sign of the cross over the sea, and the water became sweet. Dula drank his fill, and wished to refill the vessel. Seeing this, the elder said, ‘Why did you refill it?’

“‘Forgive me,’ Dula replied; ‘it was in case I became thirsty again along the way.’

“Then the elder replied, ‘God is both here and everywhere ’” (*Memorable Sayings from the Lives of the Desert Fathers*).

The Lord does not fulfill harmful or untimely requests, however. We ourselves would not fulfill the request of a child which, if granted, would kill him, make him sick, or hurt him in any other way, and God the Father treats all believers likewise. People often wonder, “Why did God not hear

me when I prayed?” He did hear, but what we asked for would have been harmful or premature for us.

A more perfect form of prayer is *prayer of thanksgiving*. The apostle commands, *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you* (1 Thess. 5:18).

We must give thanks to the Creator for misfortune and good fortune, for success and for failure. For all this is sent by the Almighty hand for our good. As a physician sometimes prescribes bitter medicines and even operations to restore a patient to health, so God sends both joys and sorrows in order to save us—not from temporary setbacks, which will invariably cease at the hour of our death, but from eternal death in the abyss of Hades.

If we look at the lives of the martyrs we will see that many of them sang hymns of thanksgiving to God amid tortures and while being burned alive. The Holy Spirit that came upon the martyrs did not let them experience torture only, but gave them to see through the darkness of death to the ever-increasing brilliance of eternity.

One of the greatest saints of our Church, John Chrysostom, while dying in exile, betrayed, slandered, defrocked, and friendless, gave thanks to God with his final words. He exclaimed, “Glory to God for all things!”—and with these words his soul departed to the Creator. Truly an example for all Christians to emulate!

He who does not know how to give thanks to the Lord is proud and unreasoning. He will receive nothing from the Creator but the punishment he deserves.

The highest form of prayer, however, is *prayer of praise*. One who praises glorifies God for His divine perfections and the great works performed by the Master of the universe. By praying this prayer a person completely overcomes the bonds of his egoism. He no longer thinks of himself and his needs, but like the angels stands in amazement before the greatness of the glory of God Almighty. So important is this form of prayer that the Church teaches us to begin and complete every work with the words “Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages [i.e., “now, always, and forever”]. Amen.”

Praise of God is the work of those who live in the bridal chambers of eternity. The angels above hymn God. The seraphim surrounding God exclaim, *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory* (Is. 6:3). The angelic hosts with voices of thunder exclaim, *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place* (Ez. 3:12).

People who have attained sanctity in worshipping the Creator offer praise to Him (Rev. 7:12–11). All the universe by its obedience to the will of the Creator offers up a hymn of praise to Him, and hence we too must more



frequently offer a doxology of praise to the Master of worlds. God Himself has no need of our praise, but we are not truly rational if we do not give praise to the Source of beauty. Just as admiration is the normal reaction to a beautiful picture, so also the proper response of the human spirit to experiencing the Creator's presence is reverent terror and self-abandoning praise.

## CONDITIONS FOR PROPER PRAYER

In order to pray properly, however, one must observe several conditions. Firstly, the person praying must have Orthodox faith. Christ said, *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you* (Jn. 16:23). Hence, one who does not believe in Christ will receive nothing from God.

64 | Secondly, one must not be verbose. The Lord said, *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him* (Mt. 6:7–8).

Thirdly, one must forgive all those by whom one has been offended. *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses* (Mk. 11:25).

Fourthly, one must believe that he will receive what he asks of the Creator. Otherwise God will not grant what is asked. *What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them* (Mk. 11:24).

Fifthly, one must struggle with one's sins, for *God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth* (Jn. 9:31). As God said, *but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word* (Is. 66:2).

One who fulfills these petitions will be heard in the heights of the Heavens.

## HOW TO PRAY PROPERLY

We consist of a soul and a body; hence, our prayer is both *external* and *internal*. The apostle's command is to *glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's* (1 Cor. 6:20).

As the soul is more important than the body, so also internal prayer is more important than external. Sometimes a person may pray only internally. Thus the prophet Moses prayed wordlessly to God, and at his petition the Red Sea was divided (Ex. 14:15). Neophyte Christians, however, must not pray only internally; otherwise the body will not benefit and the soul will become lax.

Internal prayer has three stages of development. The first is *prayer with imagery*, when during prayer a person pictures the saints, the Theotokos, and the Lord Himself. The holy fathers categorically prohibit praying in this manner, for the result is that a person begins to worship not the living God but his own fantasies, an idol of his own creation. It is no wonder that this kind of prayer can result in the terrible state of *spiritual delusion* (self-delusion as an extreme form of pride), demonic illusions, and even madness.

The second stage of prayer, to which the one praying must proceed with all haste, is called *prayer of the mind*. In this kind of prayer the attention is concentrated on the words of the prayer, and the heart begins to address God. A person learns to ignore the thoughts that arise in his mind, and to keep his attention from constantly slipping away from him. But this prayer too is imperfect. For the dissolution of human nature has not been overcome, and the mind is separated from the heart. One who thinks that perfection may be achieved through concentrated attention alone falls into a subtle pride, and his heart cools.

Anyone who strives to achieve perfection must unite mind and heart and achieve the highest of all earthly methods of prayer: *prayer of the mind and heart*. In order for a person to reach this level help is needed from God Himself, for He alone has the power to retain a person's wandering mind within him. Ordinarily, for a Christian who participates in the sacraments this occurs by itself. Though there are methods for achieving these depths, they must be employed only with the help and guidance of a spiritually experienced mentor.

During this prayer the attention is focused on the upper part of the heart, into which descends the mind, which unites in itself our whole decayed nature. Thus, in the heart as in a temple a person offers truly pure prayer to the Creator. It is of this that the Lord said, *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet* [literally, "into thy cage"], *and when thou hast shut thy door* [i.e., the inner feelings], *pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly* (Mt. 6:6).

The result of this prayer is that the deep-seated roots of sin are burned out of a person, and the one praying achieves the vision of God, when the Holy Spirit Himself begins to pray within him: *the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered* (Rom. 8:26).

## EXTERNAL PRAYER

As we have said above, besides internal prayer there must also be external, bodily prayer. For our whole nature must share in the glory of the Lord. For this we have the art of external prayer, which is essential to salvation.

First, however, we will speak of the dangers that threaten the person who prays with internal prayer spoken with the lips. Frequently it happens that a person pronounces the words, but his thoughts float off to some place far away. Frequently also people read through the texts of the prayers without understanding their meaning. This approach is more suited to magicians than to Christians. God is angered by prayer that is mere gum-flapping. He says, *This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men* (Mt. 15:8–9).

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A certain Spirit-bearing elder gave this example: “Imagine that you find yourself in a palace before the emperor, and at that moment a cage of arrested rebels is brought in. Then, instead of answering the king’s questions, you strike up a conversation with his enemies. Will the king not punish you along with them? So also God is angered by those who during prayer converse with thoughts that are from the enemy.”

We cannot control whether or not idle thoughts occur to us. But we can control whether we accept them or reject them.

To avoid this one must understand each word of prayer. The apostle Paul says, *Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, than by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue* (1 Cor. 14:19). This is why the Church has always taken care to translate the prayers into understandable language.

## THE LANGUAGE OF COMMUNION WITH GOD<sup>23</sup>

Frequently one hears reproaches that due to the Church’s use of Church Slavonic “no one can understand a thing.” Indeed, our language is unusual, but can it be said that no one understands it? The prayers in Church Slavonic exist for those who are already living a Christian life, not for preaching to passers-by. If Christians themselves did not understand the divine services, it would indeed be necessary to change the language, but such is not the case.

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<sup>23</sup> *Editor’s note:* While the following discussion of Church Slavonic is specific to the Orthodox Church in Slavic countries, it also applies to liturgical English, which often preserves many archaic grammatical, stylistic, and lexical elements from the Golden Age of English literature.

The Slavonic language is a special, sacred form of Russian. It is, if you will, the “specialized terminology” of prayer. Naturally, a person listening to a lecture on advanced mathematics for the first time will hardly understand a thing. Small wonder, then, if the language of prayer is also not immediately understandable! It is intended for a specific purpose, and if no effort is made to achieve that purpose no translation will be of any use.

The very singularity of this language helps one to break free of the mundane world and concentrate on the divine. For our ordinary speech is encumbered with a plethora of associations that invariably hinder prayer. This of course does not imply that Church Slavonic is a question of dogma for us. Christians of nationalities other than Russian pray in the sacred forms of their own languages. In the Russian Church these include Tatar, Ossetian, Yakut, Japanese, Chinese, Georgian, Greek, and many others.

### PRAYING “IN ONE’S OWN WORDS” VS. “IN SOMEONE ELSE’S WORDS”

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Many likewise reproach us for praying “in someone else’s words.” This reproach, however, is unjust and absurd. Firstly, the Church has never forbidden anyone to pray in their own words, as long as the prayer is addressed to the Holy Trinity. Secondly, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself set us the example of praying “in someone else’s words” when He prayed on Golgotha in the words of the psalms (Mt. 27:46 — Ps. 21:2; Lk. 23:46 — Ps. 30:6). And this is natural, because the goal of prayer is not just conversation with God, but a person’s transfiguration, and the words the Church proposes for prayer have come from the lips of the martyrs and the venerable ones, who prayed at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26–27). Naturally, the attitude and spirituality of these prayers far exceed our own amateur petitions. The prayers are given us “to grow into,” so that we can rise to their authors’ loftiness of spirit.

### PROPER BEHAVIOR DURING PRAYER

One must pray in every place and at every time, but there are also times especially set aside for prayer.

These are, firstly, the morning, immediately upon awakening, and the evening, before sleep. These prayers are the daily rule of the Christian. They

help to dedicate the day and the night to the Lord, and provide a sort of framework for the art of prayer that we practice continually. One who does not keep this rule begins to wilt spiritually, and the soul is easily seized by despondency and the other passions.

Secondly, these are the prayers before and after meals, and also before and after doing any good work. As the apostle Paul said, *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Cor. 10:31). And in another place he writes, *For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer* (1 Tim. 4:4–5).

Finally, the zealous Christian must dedicate particular moments of the day to the glorification of God. King David, despite his many affairs, praised the Lord seven times a day: *Seven times a day have I praised Thee for the judgments of Thy righteousness* (Ps. 118:164). It is good to glorify God at dawn (and to sing the great doxology, “Glory to God in the highest,” which is sung in the church at matins), at nine o’clock in the morning, at three o’clock in the afternoon, and in the evening when the lamps are lit (at this time “O Gentle Light” is sung in the church at vespers). If when we cannot be at the service we at least read the prayer “Our Father,” the entire rhythm of our life will be transfigured.

What must precede prayer? A person must first calm himself, if he can. He washes his hands (recalling the necessity of cleansing the heart), stands before the icons, lights a candle or lampada, and reverently begins to read the sacred words, forcing his mind and heart to attend to what is written. It is a good thing to guard one’s hearing and sight from all that could distract from prayer—the television, the radio, various noises. It is best to go into a separate room or to go outside, if one has the opportunity. All this is an aid to more focused prayer.

It is not customary for a man to pray in shorts or in a hat, or for a woman to pray in pants or with her head uncovered. The Bible says, *The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God* (Deut. 22:5). The apostle Paul adds, *Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven* (1 Cor. 11:4–5). A woman’s covering of her head is not an empty formality, but a sign for the angels: *For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels* (1 Cor. 11:10).

It is customary to pray standing, showing that we have become children of the Heavenly Father, before Whom we stand face to Face. If we are sick or very tired, however, we may also pray sitting. As St. Seraphim of Sarov said,

“It is better to pray while sitting than to think about one’s feet while standing.” Penitential prayer is best offered while kneeling.

The *Typicon* (the Order of Divine Services) calls for crossing one’s hands across one’s chest during prayer, which helps us to concentrate on prayer of the heart.

## THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The most important act during prayer for a Christian is the sign of the cross. St. John of Damascus says that “the most marvelous of all [Christ’s miracles] is His precious Cross. For no other thing has subdued death, expiated the sin of the first parent, despoiled Hades, bestowed the Resurrection, granted the power to us of condemning the present and even death itself, prepared the return to our former blessedness, opened the gates of Paradise, given our nature a seat at the right hand of God, and made us the children and heirs of God, save the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The death of Christ, that is, the Cross, clothed us with the enhypostatic wisdom and power of God. ... This was given to us as a sign on our forehead, just as the circumcision was given to Israel: for by it we believers are separated and distinguished from unbelievers. This is the shield and weapon against, and trophy over, the devil. This is the seal that the destroyer may not touch you, as says the Scripture (Ex. 12:23). This is the resurrection of those lying in death, the support of the standing, the staff of the weak, the rod of the flock, the safe conduct of the earnest, the perfection of those that press forwards, the salvation of soul and body, the aversion of all things evil, the patron of all things good, the taking away of sin, the plant of resurrection, the tree of eternal life.”<sup>24</sup>

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It is no wonder that this wonderful standard of Christ’s love accompanies us during prayer. For as has already been said, the only pleasing prayer is one that is offered to the Father in the Son’s name (Jn. 16:23). The precious Cross is the standard that Christ raised for all nations (Is. 11:10), and the Church fulfills God’s command to unceasingly remember the Law and the Creator’s benefactions (Deut. 11:18–20). The custom of guarding oneself with the sign of the cross comes to us from apostolic tradition, as is also testified by the countless lives of the ancient martyrs, and the records of the ancient Christian writers.

Orthodox Christians make the sign of the cross as follows: the first three fingers of the right hand (the thumb, index finger, and middle finger) are reverently brought together, indicating our faith that God is a Trinity,

<sup>24</sup> St. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Faith*, IV, 11.

one in essence and indivisible. The remaining two fingers (the ring and little fingers) are folded down onto the palm, expressing our faith that our Lord Jesus Christ, Who descended from the heavens to earth for the sake of our salvation, is true God and true man. Thus arranged, the right hand is first placed upon the brow or forehead, that God might enlighten our mind; then upon the stomach, to tame the flesh that wars against the spirit; then upon the right and left shoulders, for the sanctification of our actions.

The order of the sign of the cross is frequently explained in another way: in placing the hand upon the forehead we confess the preëternal existence of Christ with the Father; upon the belly—His descent from the heavens and our salvation; upon the right shoulder—the justification and eternal blessedness of the righteous; and upon the left shoulder—the curse of sinners. It is to signify that God’s truth overcomes the malice of sinners that we cross ourselves from right to left.

The sign of the cross must be made unhurriedly and properly, with reverence for the Lord. “It must not be depicted with the fingers only,” writes St. Cyril, “but rather deliberately and with complete faith. If you depict it thus upon your brow, not a single unclean spirit will be able to approach you, seeing the sword by which it was wounded, the weapon from which it received a mortal wound.”<sup>25</sup>

Experience indeed shows that every impure power flees from the sign of the cross. Frequently even UFOs have disappeared at the sign of the cross! Conversely, one who carelessly waves his hand about in front of his face instead of reverently depicting the cross merely delights the demons, for this person is committing the grave sin of sacrilege.

We guard ourselves with the sign of the cross before, during, and after prayer, upon entering the church, and when we venerate icons, the cross, and holy relics.

In addition to prayer we cross ourselves in joy and in grief, before beginning any good work and upon its completion. “Let us not then be ashamed to confess the Crucified,” writes St. Cyril of Jerusalem. “Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything; over the bread we eat, and the cups we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we rise up; when we are in the way, and when we are still.”<sup>26</sup> Tertullian (A.D. 211) writes that Christians seal themselves with the cross “at every move, at every entrance and exit, in washing, in lighting a candle, at their bed, upon sitting, and in every event.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, XIII, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Tertullian, *On the Warrior’s Crown*, 3.



When a person's heart is tossed in a storm of confusion, and the passions of anger or fornication attack, he should cross his breast. Parents make the sign of the cross over their children in parting, shepherds—their animals, and drivers—the road. In so doing we consecrate all things to the name of the triune God, saying, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

When a priest or bishop blesses the people, he arranges his fingers to symbolically depict the name of Jesus Christ (IC XC), the One Crucified for our sake.

## BOWS

The Most-high God is worthy of all worship and veneration. And any creation of His that wishes to manifest its love and veneration does so through worship. The Creator is worshiped by the citizens of heaven (Rev. 7:9–12), the righteous men of old (Gen. 22:5, Ex. 34:13–14), and the apostles (Mt. 28:17). Even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself knelt in prayer to the Father (Lk. 22:41). At the end of time, every knee will bow at the name of Jesus—of those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10–11).

Scripture calls upon all of us also, saying, *O come, let us worship and fall down before Him, and let us weep before the Lord Who made us. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand* (Ps. 94:6–7).

We are required, however, to offer proper worship. As Christ said, *God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth* (Jn. 4:24). Hence, in bowing down to God we must not only bow our knees: our heart too must express love for God, asking of Him forgiveness of sins and thanking Him for the great gift of His compassion. But we also worship in body, for we are created as spiritual and bodily beings, and hence we must glorify God in both our bodies and our spirits, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:20).

In keeping with the Scriptures, the Church distinguishes between *divine worship* and *venerative worship*. The first is due to God alone, and is also called *service* (Mt. 4:10), while the second is offered to all those whom God has deigned to honor. We offer venerative worship to holy things—the temple of God (Ps. 5:8), sacred images (Ex. 25:18; Num. 26:6–9; 2 Chron. 3:10–13), the Cross of Christ (Ps. 98:5; 131:7), the angels (Gen. 19:1; Judg. 13:20), and

God's saints (2 Sam. 2:14–15) and their bodies, which are the temples of God (1 Cor. 6:19). In the same way we bow before government representatives as servants of God (Rom. 13:1–7), priests as pastors (1 Pet. 5:1–5, Heb. 13:17), and each other, knowing that each of us is the image of God (Gen. 1:31). But divine worship or service we offer up to God alone, and we bow in this way only before the Holy Gifts, which are the True Body and Blood of the Son of God.

How does one worship properly? We worship before holy things or toward the east, as apostolic tradition commands us. For our God is spiritual light (1 Jn. 1:5), and Christ is called the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2) and the Dayspring from on high (Zech. 3:8; Lk. 1:78), and with just cause, for the east is in effect a natural icon of God. Paradise of old, our ancient fatherland, which we lost and wish to restore, was in the east (Gen. 2:8). The Lord ascended from a mountain to the east of Jerusalem, and He will return *as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west* (Mt. 24:27). Hence, in anticipation of our Savior's return, we worship toward the east.

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The Church, in keeping with the Bible, recognizes two forms of bow: the *small bow* and the *great bow*. In making the small bow we show our respect for the Creator and His glory. It is made during prayer of every kind, and is also called a *metanoia*, a Greek word meaning “repentance.” A person first reverently signs himself with the sign of the cross, thereby expressing his faith in Christ Crucified, then bows low enough to touch the ground with his hand. When a priest blesses a person during a worship service, that person should bow from the waist without making the sign of the cross.

The great bow, or prostration, according to the explanation of St. Basil the Great, signifies our fall into sin and restoration therefrom by the power of Christ. It is made on weekdays, particularly during Great Lent. To make a prostration a person likewise crosses himself, then kneels and touches his forehead to the ground, then rises to his feet. The 20th canon of the First Ecumenical Council (and a number of other canons) prohibits making prostrations on Sundays (beginning on Saturday evening) and during the period from Pascha to Pentecost. The Order of Divine Services extends this prohibition to all great feasts. The reason for this is that on these days we witness to the fact that we have become sons of God through holy baptism (Gal. 4:7), and it is not fitting that the sons should make slavish obeisance. For this same reason we do not make prostrations during the Lord's Prayer (“Our Father”). This rule only pertains to those who are not barred from Communion, however. The latter, who have been penalized by the Church, must make prostrations on all days, begging God for forgiveness.

## THE HOLY ICONS

In order to remain collected during prayer and not be distracted into creating one's own fantasies, the Church invites us to pray before the holy icons. An icon, or holy image, is a sacred depiction of God, the Mother of God, an angel, or a saint. It is a testimony to God's activity in the world, and a mystical window into the spiritual world. The veneration of holy icons, which has existed in the Church since the time of the holy prophet Moses (Ex. 25:18), was ultimately ratified by the fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council. According to tradition, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself miraculously imprinted the image of His face upon a napkin and sent it to Abgar, king of Osroene (Edessa). Upon venerating this sacred object the king received healing from his leprosy. In the catacombs, where the early Christians hid from persecution, we see numerous sacred images, confirming the apostolic origins of the veneration of icons. Even in Pompei, which perished beneath the ashes of Vesuvius (in A.D. 79), depictions of the cross and icons have been found. The Lord has worked numerous miracles for us through His icons, showing that they are pleasing to Him.

As has already been noted, however, we do not venerate the holy icons as God, and we do not honor the materials of the image (wood, paint, prints, etc.), but rather the One Who is depicted in the image. Just as we frequently express our love by kissing the photographs of our loved ones, so also by kissing the icons, burning incense before them, and lighting lampadas and candles we offer venerative worship to the prototype. In this same way we venerate the Word of God, the Bible, kissing it, and an icon is a pictorial Gospel. For the icon depicts biblical events or the evangelical virtues incarnate in the saints, whose life we learn to imitate by gazing upon their images.

The great prophet Isaiah during his vision contemplated God, enthroned amid flaming seraphim. The Church enables us to behold the face of the Creator. Yes, God is by nature invisible and undepictable, but since the Divine Incarnation He has become depictable in the flesh, and hence the Church offers to Christians for veneration the images of God, Who manifested Himself to men. The Church blesses four types of icons of God [the Father]: the Lord's appearance to Abraham in the form of three angels ("The Old Testament Trinity"), the Baptism of Christ in Jordan, where the Father gave voice proclaiming His Son, and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove; the Lord's Transfiguration, where the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ as a cloud of glory; and, finally, Pentecost—the Descent of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, upon the apostles in the form of tongues of fire.

The widespread images of the Trinity depicting the Father as an old man, Christ, and a dove ("The New Testament Trinity" or "The Paternity") are



contrary to the dogma of the 7th Ecumenical Council and were condemned at the Great Moscow Council of 1666–1667.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God the Word (Jn. 1:14), Whom the apostles beheld with their eyes and felt with their hands (1 Jn. 1:1–3), we depict in various forms: as the Infant in the arms of His Mother; teaching the people; crucified on the Cross; resurrected; ascended; and sitting in glory with the Father on the Day of Judgment. After the sacrament of baptism and on the first Sunday of Great Lent we all kiss His icon along with the image of the Theotokos, by our actions showing our faith in the authenticity of the saving Divine Incarnation, by which we are saved.

We depict the Virgin Mary in countless icons as the true Theotokos, who gave birth in the flesh to Him Who is eternal God. She is the most exalted of the angels of heaven, and we turn to her as our most intimate protectress and intercessor before God. On the Cross Christ made us children of the Virgin Mary, and Christians are her children.

According to tradition, the first icons of the Theotokos were painted by the apostle Luke. Upon seeing the first of these she said, “The grace of My Son shall be with this icon.”

Christians likewise depict the holy angels in icons, in the form in which they have appeared numerous times to men. These icons are the most ancient, for they appeared in the tabernacle of Moses and in Solomon’s Temple.

Since Christ saved us by His Cross and Resurrection, righteous men have likewise become like the angels (Lk. 20:36), so that already here on earth the face of the first martyr Stephen was like the face of an angel (Acts. 6:16). This celestial radiance is depicted on the icons in the form of a halo (a golden circlet about the head), symbolizing that the righteous will shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father (Mt. 13:43), with the light of the Holy Spirit Who has come to dwell within them.

As in the tabernacle God commanded that angels be depicted, so now in the New Testament the Church is filled with images of the *saints* of God (those who have pleased God by their righteous life), so that by gazing upon the end of their life we might imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7). However, only the images of those saints whose sanctity has been confirmed by the Church by decision of a council of bishops (a process called *canonization*) are worthy of veneration.

## WHO ARE THE SAINTS?

The Spirit of God by His Will has bestowed numerous and varied forms of sanctity in the Church (1 Cor. 12:4–11). Hence, the saints are likewise called differently, each according to the gift of God he has attained. There are *prophets*, *apostles*, *martyrs*, *holy hierarchs*, *venerable ones*, *righteous ones*, *unmercenaries*, and *blessed ones*.

*Prophets* are saints of God who lived predominantly before the birth of Christ, who by the power of the Lord’s Spirit foretold the future, denounced untruth, and proclaimed the coming of Christ.

*Apostles* (messengers) are the most intimate disciples of Christ the Savior, to Whom He gave the command to preach the good news of salvation

and the authority to establish churches throughout the world. Christ chose for Himself His twelve most intimate apostles and seventy others. After the Resurrection He also called the apostle Paul. The apostles Peter and Paul are called *chiefs of the apostles*, because they labored more than the rest in the work of preaching. The apostles who wrote the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are called *evangelists*.

Saints who attained renown as missionaries, converting many to Christ, are called *equals of the apostles*. Examples of these include Mary Magdalene, Prince Vladimir, Emperor Constantine, and Nicholas of Japan.

*Martyrs* (witnesses of God) are those saints who suffered for remaining faithful to Christ the Savior and His teaching to the point of death, and thereby witnessed to God's victory over death. Those who contended for Christ's name but reposed in peace are called *confessors*.

The first to suffer for the Lord were Saints Stephen and Thecla, and for this reason they are called *first martyrs*. *Martyrs* who preserved their faith amid extraordinarily grievous sufferings are called *great martyrs* (Saints George the Trophy-bearer, Barbara, Catherine, and others).

*Holy hierarchs* are bishops who pleased the Creator by their righteous life and zealous care for their flocks (for example, the holy hierarch Nicholas the Wonderworker). Three 4th-century saints—Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom—are called *ecumenical teachers*, because their teaching is the standard for the Ecumenical Church. Those bishops or priests who died for Christ are called *hieromartyrs*.

*Venerable ones* (those who attained extraordinary godlikeness) are righteous Christians who have pleased God on the monastic path. They preserved purity of body and soul and conquered the passions, withdrawing from the world. Monks who were killed for Christ are called *venerable martyrs*.

*Unmercenaries* are righteous ones who treated illnesses and healed ailments by the Lord's power without payment.

*Righteous ones* are saints who pleased God while living in the world in marriage.

*Blessed ones* and *fools for Christ's sake* are those saints who, in order to escape vainglory and pride, pretended to be mad for God's sake. They showed by their deeds that the Word of the Lord is foolishness for the world (1 Cor. 1:18–2, 16). Frequently God granted them the gift of prophecy. In Russia the most widely venerated fools for Christ's sake are Blessed Basil, Xenia of St. Petersburg, and Matrona of Moscow.

We venerate the saints as friends of Christ, as children and heirs of God. St. John of Damascus calls them “gods (Ex. 7:1) and kings and lords not in nature, but as rulers and masters of their passions, and as preserving a truth-





ful likeness to the divine image according to which they were made (for the image of a king is also called king), and as being united to God of their own free-will and receiving Him as an indweller and becoming by grace through participation with Him what He is Himself by nature. Surely, then, the worshippers and friends and sons of God are to be held in honour? For the honour shown to the most thoughtful of fellow-servants is a proof of good feeling towards the common Master.”<sup>28</sup>

We ask the saints to intercede for us before God, as the friends of Job asked for his prayers (Job 42:7–8, Gen. 20:17; Num. 16:44–48; Ex. 8:8–13). The saints likewise support our weak and infirm prayer by their powerful protection. For though abiding in the heavens they do not forget to intercede for us. We celebrate their memory, as God commands: *The memory of the just is blessed* (Prov. 10:7). We honor them with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19), giving honor to the God of the saints. On the days of their commemoration we glorify them by contrition of heart, giving alms

<sup>28</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Faith*, IV, 15.



to those in need, and participating in the Divine Liturgy. In their honor we erect churches and create sacred images, for each saint is a living memorial to the great work of the Redemption, one more fruit of the Sacrifice on the Cross. And just as the Old Testament patriarchs erected memorials at the sites of Divine manifestations, so we too glorify the living temples of God—the saints, whose countrymen we have become (Eph. 2:19). Thus the unity of the Church in heaven and on earth is manifested. According to the apostle Paul, if *one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it* (1 Cor. 12:26).

## RELICS OF THE SAINTS

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Our love is not limited to venerating the memory of the saints and their depictions. We offer fitting homage to their bodies also, as true temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; 3:16). The power of God abides in them even after death, showing the truth of the future general resurrection. Hence, these bodies are called *holy relics*.

Through them God works a multitude of wonders—healing the sick, driving out demons, and emitting fragrant oil (*myrrh*). In ancient times the bones of the prophet Elisha resurrected a dead man (2 Kings 13:21). If God poured out water for the Hebrews even from a rock (Ex. 17:6), all the more so is grace manifested in the relics of the saints after the life-giving death of the Lord. For healings were worked by the very clothing of Christ (Mk. 5:28–29) and the apostles (Acts 19:21).

From the incorrupt Body of Jesus (Acts 2:31) the bodies of the saints who share in the power of His Resurrection are frequently given the gift of incorruption, so that instead of decaying they are preserved incorrupt and filled with fragrance. For example, the relics of St. Alexander of Svir have preserved all the properties of a living body half a millennium later, remaining soft and light-colored, and they exude wonderworking myrrh. The caves of the Kiev Caves Lavra hold the incorrupt bodies of hundreds of saints. These bodies, purified by ascetic labors, will be glorified on the Last Day.

It is for this reason that we show relics the same veneration that is offered to the temple and the saints. We kiss them, light candles and lampadas before them, burn incense, and bow down before them (Ps. 5:8; Dan. 2:46). In accordance with ancient tradition, particles of the relics of the martyrs are placed beneath the altar table of the temple, for a remembrance of the souls [of those] killed for God's name, who abide beneath the heavenly altar (Rev. 6:9–11).

## LAMPADAS AND CANDLES

As we have said above, in fulfillment of the dogmatic resolution of the 7th Ecumenical Council, during prayer and simply as a sign of our respect for the Creator Christians light candles and lampadas before icons and relics. This custom is based on the words of Scripture: *And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always. In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the Lord* (Ex. 27:20–21).

The prototype of this lamp is in the heavens, where a seven-branched candlestick shines before the face of God the Father (Rev. 4:5)—a symbol of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit—and this custom, based on celestial reality, was adopted by the Apostolic Church as well. Thus, the book of the Acts of the Apostles describes a night-time Liturgy served in the Troad by the apostle Paul. The Liturgy was served in an upper chamber where there were many lamps (Acts 20:8).

Like all sacred traditions, this one is profoundly significant. The lamps that are lit before icons and held during divine worship symbolize the “the illumination there with which we shall meet the Bridegroom, shining and virgin souls, with the lamps of our faith shining.”<sup>29</sup>

They remind us of our sacrifice to the Creator and require that we burn in spirit when at prayer. When we purchase a wax candle in the church we are making an offering toward the maintenance of the house of God. When we light a candle and a lampada at home we are rendering due honor to those depicted in the icons. Our own prayer likewise becomes more pure and profound, for if when we address the Trinity we offer Him a sacrifice along with our prayer, this sacrifice will help us to be less distracted as we stand before the eternal radiance of the Trinity. The very material things that we offer in sacrifice remind us of God. Olive oil is an ancient symbol of God’s mercy and His healing power. Since ancient times oil has been used to soothe irritation and heal wounds (Lk. 10:34). At the same time it is a symbol of our good works, as we are reminded by the parable of the ten virgins (Mt. 25:1–13).

The candle burning before the icon exudes a fragrance of honey and the honeycomb, the sweetness and aroma of which Scripture compares to the words of God’s Law (Ps. 17:11, Ps. 118:109). It consists of three elements, the combination of which describes the spiritual life of the Christian. Wax is a symbol of good works; the wick is a symbol of the Orthodox faith; and the fire is a symbol of the grace bestowed through the sacraments. Symeon

<sup>29</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, Talk 40.

of Thessalonica wrote that “wax, being a substance most pure, signifies our purity and the sincerity of our offering. Wax, being a substance upon which objects may be imprinted, signifies the seal and the sign of the Cross, which are placed upon us in baptism and chrismation. Wax, being a substance that is soft and malleable, signifies our obedience and readiness to repent of our sinful life. Wax, being gathered from fragrant flowers, signifies the grace of the Holy Spirit. Wax, being compiled of many flowers, signifies the offering made by all Christians. Wax, being a flammable substance, signifies our deification (by the Divine Flame). Finally, wax, in which fire burns, and this constantly-burning light, signify the union and strength of our mutual love and peace.”<sup>30</sup>

## BURNING INCENSE

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As an aid to our prayers the Church has likewise established the custom of burning incense. In his time Moses the God-seer received from God the command to burn holy incense before the Ark of the Covenant every evening and morning (Ex. 30:7–8, 34–38). This ritual is preserved to this day in our temples.

The burning of incense is not merely a formality. Incense is a symbol of the prayers of a righteous man (Rev. 5:8). Not without reason do we sing during the evening censuring, *Let my prayer be set forth as incense before thee, the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice* (Ps. 140:2). Even in the heavens the angels offer incense to God in golden censers with the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3); hence, those who reject this pious custom oppose the Word of God.

Burning incense is not merely a symbol of prayer, however. It reminds us of the immaterial fragrance of the heavenly gardens prepared for those who are saved. As the blessed soul so beautifully says in the Song of Solomon, *Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense* (Song of Sol. 4:6).

In its turn, this same heavenly fragrance is caused by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Once St. Seraphim of Sarov showed Motovilov this glory of divine communion, which is accessible to Christians while yet here on earth. In addition to inexpressible radiance and ineffable warmth Motovilov experienced an incomparable fragrance. The symbol of this heavenly sweet savor and the actual means of uniting with it is the burning of incense. With good reason the priest blesses the censer with the words, “Incense do we offer unto

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<sup>30</sup> St. Symeon of Thessalonica, *Book on the Church*, 134.

Thee, O Christ our God, as an odor of spiritual fragrance; accepting it upon Thy most heavenly altar, do Thou send down upon us the grace of Thy Most Holy Spirit.”

Indeed, as Father Pavel Florensky rightly noted, the clouds of smoke from the censer rise up to the supercosmic sphere and return filled with strange power. It is no accident that in Old Testament times incense signified a weapon defending a person against deadly powers. When the Hebrews rebelled against Moses, and God sent the plague against them, at Moses' command Aaron took a censer with incense and stood among the dead and the living, and the plague ceased (Num. 16:41–50). For this reason to this day censuring is employed as a defense against the devil and his servants. It is no accident that many of the ungodly, not wishing to part with their evil deeds, cannot bear the smell of incense.

Here it should be noted that burning incense is not always pleasing to God, for some burn incense before idols as well. For example, some light incense sticks before idols of Buddha or photographs of various “gurus.” This is truly an abomination to the Lord, and strips a person of the name of Christian. The martyrs of old went to their deaths rather than commit such an act of apostasy. Saint Babilus, for example, was dragged to an altar, and his hand was held over a fire to force him to cast several pieces of incense before an idol. But the saint endured the flame until his hand was completely burned through. He did so because he knew that every burned fleck of incense would not merely dissipate into the atmosphere, but would be a sacrifice to Satan.

How should one cense at home? One should purchase incense at church; a special prayer of blessing has been read over the incense in the church. Then, during prayer or if demonic activity is at work in the home, we place a piece of incense on a burning coal in a hand censer or simply over a lamp. We make the sign of the cross over it in the name of the Holy Trinity and begin to pray. If one senses the presence of evil power in the home, while censuring the prayer is read to the Precious Cross, “Let God Arise.”

## EXPLANATION OF SEVERAL PRAYERS

Here we should give an explanation of several of the most commonly used prayers, so that beginners might pray with understanding, deliberately.

Our every work is begun to the glory of the Holy Trinity. Hence we say, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”



The work which we begin will be sealed by the name of the Holy Trinity and will be performed to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen* is a Hebrew word meaning “truly so,” “let it be so.” This word, so frequently used by the Lord, is also one of the Divine names (Rev. 3:14), because Christ Himself will say “amen” to every creation at the end of time.

By this prayer we ask the triune God to bless us for the work that lies before us. In fulfilling the behest of the apostle (1 Cor. 10:31) to do all things to the glory of God, we precede our every work with the words, “O Lord, bless.”

Before beginning any prayer we recite the penitential prayer of the publican from Christ’s parable of the publican and the Pharisee (Lk. 18:9–14): “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

Let us recall the parable. Two men went into the temple to pray. One of them was a Pharisee (an expert in the Law of God, who considered himself righteous), and the other—a publican (a tax auditor or collector of tribute who worked for the Romans. Publicans were justly considered great sinners—traitors and extortionists). The Pharisee stood out in front and prayed thus: “O God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are—thieves, evildoers, adulterers, or this publican.” But the publican, standing in back, did not dare even to raise up his eyes to heaven, but only beat his breast and said, “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” And the Lord said that the publican went back to his house more justified than the Pharisee, whose prayer was repugnant to the Lord in its pridefulness.

“Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.”

Before beginning to pray a layman asks the Lord Jesus for help in this. Understanding that our prayers are weak, distracted, and lacking in boldness, the layman needs the support of the saints, that their strong voice might support our weak one. Hoping in their intercessions, we pray Christ that He take pity on us and heal us. For us the words “have mercy” first and foremost signify not an excuse from judicial liability for our acts, but God’s fatherly pity toward men. When the equal of the apostles Nicholas translated this word into Japanese he rejected the term “to grant amnesty,” instead employing a word that literally means “to show a mother’s pity.” In Greek the word for “have mercy,” *eleison*, sounds almost exactly like the word for olive oil (*eleon*), which is used to soothe irritation and wounds. Thus, the words “Lord, have mercy” mean “Lord, take pity, heal, and spare us.”

“Glory to Thee, our God, glory to Thee.”

We preface every act with a glorification of the Creator, sending up glory to the Maker. In this same way the blessed beings in the heavens begin their hymns with a doxology to God.

Before beginning any work one must ask help of the Source of holiness, the Holy Spirit, so that everything we do might serve to the glory of God. This prayer is read numerous times in the Church, but it is sung especially often on the day of Pentecost, when the third Person of the Holy Trinity appeared to men in the form of tongues of fire, which came to rest upon the apostles of Christ. The prayer to the Holy Spirit is as follows:

“O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of good things and Giver of Life, come and dwell in us, and cleanse us of all impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.”

Here the third Hypostasis of the Trinity is called the King of Heaven, because the Father sent Him through the Son from the heavens into the world, so that just as among the angels of heaven the Spirit is the Eternal King, so also on earth men might submit to His heavenly power.

He is called Comforter, or Protector (in Greek, *paraklete*) in accordance with the Savior’s words (Jn. 14:16), for He defends the faithful from sin, the curse, and death, comforts them in sorrows, enlivens souls dead in despondency, drives away the onslaught of the devil, and abides with us eternally.

He is the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17) because He bears witness to the Truth—to Christ (Jn. 14:6; 15:26)—in men’s hearts, frees all from falsehood and untruth, and gives men a firm foundation in this uncertain world. He denounces the world for its sin and untruth, and proclaims to it the judgment of God (Jn. 16:8–11).

God the Holy Spirit is present everywhere and fills all things. Scripture says that *the Spirit of the Lord has filled the world, and that which holds*

*all things together knows what is said; therefore no one who utters unrighteous things will escape notice, and justice, when it punishes, will not pass him by* (Wisd. 1:7–8). There is no place to hide from the Holy Spirit, and He guards even the ends of the universe; hence, in any place one who calls upon Him will receive aid.

The Holy Spirit is the treasury of good things, for in Him are the roots of all the virtues and in Him are all gifts, both physical and spiritual. His fruits are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, mercy, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22–23). Communion with the Spirit is the source of delight in eternal life.

In the Greek text of the prayer the life-creating Spirit is also called the Director, the Choirmaster of the choir of life (the Greek χορηγός, which literally means “choir director,” is translated into the Slavonic as “Giver of life”). As Creator and Director of the world He infuses all living things with life, and in His hands are the sources of life in every form (vegetable, animal, angelic, human, and, most importantly, Divine), which He skillfully directs, forming all beings into a single choir to the Heavenly Father.

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For this reason we ask the Great God, the Holy Spirit, to come to us and dwell within us. As during the Hebrews’ wandering in the desert God the Holy Spirit went before them in the form of a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud, standing before the tabernacle (a portable tent church), so also He will come to dwell in us, leading us through the desert of this mortal world into the incorrupt Kingdom of God.

We ask Him to cleanse us of all impurity, knowing that it is He Whom Christ gave to the apostles for the forgiveness of our sins (Jn. 20:22–23), for He is called preeminently Holy, as the source of holiness and all radiant purity—for men and for angels.

Our final, paramount request is a prayer to the Good Spirit (Ps. 142:10) for the salvation of our souls, for there is nothing more important that we could possibly ask of the merciful God.

## THE BEGINNING PRAYERS

**N**ext we will examine the prayers which Christians call the *beginning prayers* (sometimes collectively called “*The Trisagion through Our Father*”).

**The Trisagion:** “**Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us.**” (This is read three times, each time with the sign of the cross and a bow from the waist.)

According to church tradition, in the year 438 under Saint Proclus, patriarch of Constantinople, a terrible earthquake occurred in the capital



of Byzantium. Buildings collapsed, and monstrous fissures appeared in the earth. In fear the inhabitants ran out into the streets and began begging God for forgiveness of their sins. Suddenly one boy was caught up into the heavens by an invisible power. When he returned to earth he related that the heavenly choirs were alternately crying out to one another the hymn, “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal” (Is. 6:2–3; Rev. 4:8). Upon hearing this the people took up the angelic hymn, adding to it the words “have mercy on us,” and immediately the earthquake ceased. This prayer gained universal importance for the Church when it was sung by the fathers of the 4th Ecumenical Council.

This prayer is addressed to the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The word “holy” in reference to the three Persons signifies their incomparability with anything in existence, and “freedom from all impurity and spotless purity that is perfect in every respect.”<sup>31</sup>

The name *God* here refers to the Father, for He is the source of Divinity, the mystical Root from which the Son and the Spirit proceed. The Mighty (or Powerful) One is the Only-begotten Son, by Whom the world was made, Who retains it within Himself, and to Whom all will come at the end of time. The Immortal One is the Holy Spirit, the Life-creating Lord. He is by nature not subject to death. On the contrary, all life has its source in Him. All three Persons are uniformly holy. In witness of the fact that the Trinity is one God we add “have mercy on us,” in the singular.<sup>32</sup>

**“Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.”**

This doxology permeates all the prayers and worship of the Church. The pinnacle of the knowledge of God is knowledge of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and hence all prayer is crowned by the invocation of the three sacred Names. The glory that is due to God is not merely the delight and exultation with which creation is seized before the face of the Source of Being, but the inherent radiance of God. Holy Scripture gives the name *glory* to the Lord’s manifestation as the effulgence of the unwaning Light. The glory of God is that uncreated power, the eternal Kingdom, that has surrounded the incomprehensible Being since before time began. When we glorify God we ourselves desire to become participants in this eternal dawn, as God said: *For them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed* (1 Sam. 2:30).

This glory belongs to God today and always, and when time shall be no more. The “ages of ages” are those happy times that await the saved after the

<sup>31</sup> St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *On the Divine Names*, 12:2.

<sup>32</sup> *Translator’s note:* In languages such as Russian that distinguish between singular and plural forms of second-person verbs, the singular form of the verb is used here.

end of those times that have been marred by death, when Christ will gather Christians to Himself and lead them into the glory of the Creator. By these words we also confess that the power and glory of God extend to all worlds and times, however many they may be, because He is the Creator and Absolute Master of all that exists.

**The Prayer to the Most Holy Trinity:** “O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. O Lord, blot out our sins; O Master, pardon our iniquities; O Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for Thy name’s sake.”

**The Lord’s Prayer.** This prayer is the most important in Christianity, because it was given by the Savior Himself as the model for all prayers (Mt. 6:9–13; Lk. 11:2–4). “When we pray, may the Father recognize the words of His Son, abiding within us, in our heart, and may He be in our speech also. As He is the intercessor before the Father for our sins, in praying for our sins let us sinners also employ the words of our Intercessor” (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*).

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“Our Father, Who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”

The Lord’s Prayer has been interpreted by many holy men who were illumined with the light of the Spirit of God; hence, we will base our interpretation of it on their explanations.

In beginning our petitions we daringly address our great God—the primordial Creator and Ruler of the universe—as our Father. This is something truly incredible, but the Savior Himself has given us this right, for, united with Him by baptism, Christians become sons and daughters of God.

Thus we address Him with these words: *Our Father, Who art in the heavens!* He is the Father, not just to me personally, but to the whole Church united with Christ. For this reason we say *our*, and not *my*. “The sons of this Father are the rich man and the poor; the sons of this Father are the master and the servant; the sons of this Father are the commanding officer and the simple soldier—and all of them are brethren. On earth all believing Christians have various fathers, some of noble birth, others not, but all call upon the one Father Who is in the heavens. If our Father is in heaven, our inheritance is also being prepared in heaven. For our Father is wont to grant us dominion together with Him.”<sup>33</sup>

If then we call God our Father, we must all become like Him. Otherwise we will show ourselves to be not true children, but foundlings.

We say “Who art in the heavens” not because heaven limits His nature or is His dwelling place, but because the heavenly angels are wholly subject

<sup>33</sup> Blessed Augustine, Homily 59: *On the Lord’s Prayer*.

to His will, and in them eternal glory is manifested in its fullness. “The heavens can also be those who bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49), to whom God promised: *I will dwell in them and walk in them* (2 Cor. 6:16).”<sup>34</sup>

*Hallowed be Thy name.* The first petition is not saying that the name of God has been hallowed, i.e., made holy, for it is holy by nature. This is the more true because, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the name of the Father is Christ Himself. Rather, we are asking that in us this holiest of names, this natural icon of the Divinity, manifest its holiness and make us holy. “We ask and we pray that, having been sanctified in baptism, we remain as we have begun to be. And we pray for this each day, because we require cleansing of our daily sins through constant sanctification.”<sup>35</sup>

*Thy Kingdom come.* We ask that “the Kingdom promised by God may come, acquired by the blood and suffering of Christ. We ask that, having served in this age, we may reign then with the Master, Christ ... We ask that He quickly reveal to us His coming.”<sup>36</sup> In the words of Chrysostom, this kind of prayer comes from a good conscience and soul, free of all things earthly. Whoever has this kind of love will be unable either to grow proud amid the good things of this life or to despair amid grief; rather, as a dweller in heaven he is free of both extremes. The natural Kingdom of the Father, according to Maximus the Confessor, is the Holy Spirit, which reveals Christ and His Father to us.

*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

“As Thy will is done in the angels, O Master,” exclaims Cyril of Jerusalem, “so let it be in me on the earth.”<sup>37</sup>

“Let our intelligence, then, be moved to seek God, let our desire be roused in longing for Him, and let our incensive power struggle to keep guard over our attachment to Him.”<sup>38</sup> Let our body which was taken from the earth likewise serve the Creator, and not war against the spirit.

However, as Cyprian of Carthage explains, this petition pertains not only to Christians, but to unbelievers as well. “May God’s will be done, that they too, earthly by their first birth, may be reborn of water and the Spirit, and begin to be heavenly.”<sup>39</sup>

*Give us this day our daily bread.* This Bread is not mere food, but Holy Communion, the Divine Bread that descended from the Heavens, the Flesh of Christ, which He gave for the life of the world (Jn. 6:33, 51). This is true

<sup>34</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 5:11.

<sup>35</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 5:14.

<sup>38</sup> St. Maximus the Confessor, *Explanation of the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>39</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*.

Food, as His Blood is true Drink (Jn. 6:55). According to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “ordinary bread is not ‘daily bread,’ but rather this holy Bread is ‘daily bread,’ i.e., it affects the essence of our soul. This Bread is not contained in the belly and does not go out into the cloaca (Mt. 15:17), but rather it is distributed into your whole system, to the benefit of body and soul.”<sup>40</sup> “We ask each day that this Bread be given us,” adds Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage, “so that we, abiding in Christ and receiving the Eucharist each day as the food of salvation, being barred from and deprived of the heavenly Bread due to some grave sin, might not be separated from the Body of Christ.”<sup>41</sup>

In addition to Holy Communion, however, “this bread is also the Word of God that is proclaimed each day,” notes Blessed Augustine. “For, while not bread for the stomach, is it not bread for the soul?”<sup>42</sup>

Finally, this petition has this meaning as well: grant us, we ask God the Father, not riches, not pleasures, not costly clothing, but bread alone, each and every day. And, we add, grant us today not to crush ourselves under the weight of concerns for the coming day.<sup>43</sup> This understanding is linked to the foregoing interpretations in that our very meal is a continuation of the Eucharist.

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*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

“After the request for food follows the request for remission of sins (for sins are our debts before God), that being fed by God the person may also live in God.”<sup>44</sup>

The Creator only forgives them on condition of our compassion, however. If we do not forgive sins committed against us, God the Father will oblige us to answer for our evil deeds. Those who bear grudges and do not forgive offenses have no right to pray in the Lord’s words and consider God their Father.

*And lead us not into temptation.* We ask that God not lead us into a situation where it would be easy for us to commit evil. For “one who falls into temptation first sympathizes with the tempter.”<sup>45</sup> One must remember, however, that “the enemy has no power over us unless this has been permitted by God. For this reason all our fear, all our reverence, and all our piety must be directed toward God, as the evil one cannot tempt us unless this power be given him from above.”<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 5:15.

<sup>41</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>42</sup> Blessed Augustine, Homily 59: *On the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>43</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew*, 19:5.

<sup>44</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>45</sup> Blessed Augustine, Homily 59: *On the Lord’s Prayer*.

<sup>46</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on the Lord’s Prayer*.

*But deliver us from the evil one.* This final petition of the Lord's Prayer refers to our chief enemy, the devil, from whose brazen attack we ask that we be preserved. "Having received this protection, thereafter we are safe and defended against all the wiles of the devil and the world," notes St. Cyprian. St. John Chrysostom states that by these words the Lord is teaching us never to become irritated with our neighbors for their offences, but to direct all our enmity against the devil as the perpetrator of all evil.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, this prototypical prayer of Christ gathers together all that is needed for our soul's salvation. As Augustine said, "The Lord's prayer moves us to learn not only to ask God the Father Who is in the heavens for what we desire, but also to learn to desire what we ought."<sup>48</sup>

If this prayer is being recited in church, the priest concludes it with the exclamation: "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen." According to Chrysostom, "if His is the Kingdom, we ought to fear no one, as no one ever resists Him, and His authority is shared with no one. Even the enemy is subject to God, though he apparently does resist, by God's permissive will. His also is the power. Thus, though you be greatly infirm, yet you must have boldness, having such a King, Who even through you can easily work every glorious work. This King not only frees you from the evils that threaten, but can also make you glorious and renowned. As His power is great, so also His glory is unspeakable—in a word, all that He has is limitless and eternal."<sup>49</sup>

When a Christian prays alone he does not conclude the prayer with this exclamation, understanding that without the Church our prayer is incomplete.

## PRAYERS FOR RELATIVES

Understanding this, each day we pray for those near and dear to us. **Prayer for the living:** "Save, O Lord, and have mercy upon my spiritual father (name), my parents (names), kinsmen (names), superiors, teachers, benefactors (names), and all Orthodox Christians."

A *spiritual father* is a priest who helps a Christian walk toward Christ. Before him we make our confession to God, and he helps a person to be born

<sup>47</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew*, 19:5

<sup>48</sup> Blessed Augustine, Homily 59: *On the Lord's Prayer*

<sup>49</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Explanation of the Gospel of Matthew*, 9:6–7.

for Life Eternal. Our *kinsmen* are those related to us. We commemorate all our relatives by name, for these names are given to us all in holy baptism and are written in the Book of Life.

In addition to the living, however, we commemorate the departed. For all are alive to God, and our love must not cease the day a person dies.

**Prayer for the departed:** “Grant rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy servants who have fallen asleep: my parents, kinsmen, benefactors (names), and all Orthodox Christians, and pardon them all transgressions voluntary and involuntary, and grant them the Kingdom of Heaven.”

*Grant rest*—give rest and the peace of the Holy Spirit to the departed, that they may go to Paradise from which Adam was banished. We say *asleep*, for to a Christian death is no more than sleep for his body, since death is invariably followed by resurrection.

## PRAYER BEFORE AND AFTER MEALS

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**I**n obedience to the command of the apostle we partake of food, receiving it with thanksgiving, sanctifying it with the Word of God and with prayer (1 Tim. 4:3–5).

**Prayer before partaking of food:** “The eyes of all look to Thee with hope, and Thou gavest them their food in due season. Thou openest Thy hand and fillest every living thing with Thy favour” (Ps. 144:15–16).

**Prayer after meals:** “We thank Thee, O Christ our God, that Thou hast satisfied us with Thine earthly gifts; deprive us not of Thy heavenly Kingdom, but as Thou camest among Thy disciples, O Savior, and gavest them peace, come to us and save us.”

In addition to giving thanks for food it is fitting that a Christian give thanks to the Heavenly Father for all things, both joyous and sorrowful, keeping the commandment of Scripture to *give thanks in all circumstances* (1 Thess. 5:18).

**Thanksgiving for every benefaction from God:** “We, Thine unworthy servants, O Lord, grateful for Thy great benefactions bestowed upon us, glorifying Thee, we praise, bless, give thanks, hymn and magnify Thy deep compassion, and with submission and love we cry out unto Thee: O our Savior and Benefactor, glory to Thee!”

The Slavonic word for “compassion” *blagoutrobie* [from *blago*—good, and *utroba*—womb or belly—*Trans.*], signifies that God loves us with a mother’s love. In the words of Scripture, *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee* (Is. 49:15).

## PRAYERS OF REPENTANCE

**I**t is essential that we speak words of gratitude to God, but it is also essential that we repent and weep over our sins. We recall that one of the Commandments of Beatitude states, “Blessed are they that mourn.” We have a model of Repentance in King David, who fell into the sin of adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11–12). After repenting before the prophet Nathan he wrote a psalm that serves as a model of repentance for Christians.

## Psalm 50

Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy; and according to the multitude of Thy compassions blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know mine iniquity, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee only have I sinned and done this evil before Thee, that Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and prevail when Thou art judged. For behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins did my mother bear me. For behold, Thou hast loved truth; the hidden and secret things of Thy wisdom hast Thou made manifest unto me. Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be made clean; Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. Thou shalt make me to hear joy and gladness; the bones that be humbled, they shall rejoice. Turn Thy face away from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation and with Thy governing Spirit establish me. I shall teach transgressors Thy ways, and the ungodly shall turn back unto Thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; my tongue shall rejoice in Thy righteousness. O Lord, Thou shalt open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Thy praise. For if Thou hadst desired sacrifice, I had given it; with whole-burnt offerings Thou shalt not be pleased. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise. Do good, O Lord, in Thy good pleasure unto Sion, and let the walls of Jerusalem be builded. Then shalt Thou be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, with oblation and whole-burnt offerings. Then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.

Hyssop is a special herb that was sprinkled during sacrificial offerings. “Let the walls of Jerusalem be builded” refers to the new Jerusalem. “Then shalt Thou be pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness”—here the sacrifice is Christ Himself.



## PRAYERS AGAINST ATTACKS BY EVIL SPIRITS

We know that Christians are warriors of the Heavenly King, who wage war not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Our chief weapon is prayer and the sign of the Precious Cross. The most common prayer against the devil is Psalm 90. It shows how we must hope in God, but one should not think that merely reading or writing this text or wearing it on our bodies<sup>50</sup> can save a person. After all, it was this psalm that Satan quoted when tempting Christ (Mt. 4:6). Only the Creator Himself is able to defend us against the ancient enemy of men, provided that, as this psalm teaches us, we strive always to live beneath His protection.

### Psalm 90

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He that dwelleth in the help of the Most High shall abide in the shelter of the God of heaven. He shall say unto the Lord: Thou art my helper and my refuge. He is my God, and I will hope in Him. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunters and from every troubling word. With His shoulders will He overshadow thee, and under His wings shalt thou have hope. With a shield will His truth encompass thee; thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, Nor for the thing that walketh in darkness, nor for the mishap and demon of noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but unto thee shall it not come nigh. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and thou shalt see the reward of sinners. For Thou, O Lord, art my hope. Thou madest the Most High thy refuge; no evils shall come nigh thee, and no scourge shall draw nigh unto thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. On their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Upon the asp and basilisk shalt thou tread, and thou shalt trample upon the lion and dragon. For he hath set his hope on Me, and I will deliver him; I will shelter him because he hath known My name. He shall cry unto Me, and I will hearken unto him. I am with him in affliction, and I will rescue him and glorify him. With length of days will I satisfy him, and I will show him My salvation.

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<sup>50</sup> *Translator's note:* This psalm is sometimes embroidered on belts and worn in times of demonic onslaught.



## PRAYERS TO THE THEOTOKOS

In addition to prayers addressed to God, the Church employs prayers to the Most-pure Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. This practice is based both on the prophecy of the Theotokos herself (Lk. 1:48) and on the fact that the Lord worked His first miracle at her request in Cana of Galilee (Jn. 2:1–11). The greatest of the prayers addressed to the Mother of God is the words of the archangel Gabriel, spoken at the Annunciation of the Birth of Christ the Savior (Lk. 1:28), to which is added the exclamation of the righteous Elizabeth (Lk. 1:42–43).

**The Hymn to the Most Holy Theotokos:** “O Theotokos and Virgin, rejoice, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, for thou hast borne the Saviour of our souls.”

In contemplating the glory of the Virgin Mary’s sanctity, the archangel before whose greatness the prophet Daniel fell prostrate (Dan. 8:15–18) extolled her: *Hail, thou that art highly favoured!* (Lk. 1:28).<sup>51</sup>

Mary rejoiced in the Lord (Ps. 39:17) because she sought Him continually. In all of Scripture she alone is called “full of grace,” for she is filled with the

<sup>51</sup> In the Russian, literally “Rejoice, thou who art full of grace!”—*Trans.*

power and sanctity of God. She is permeated with divine rays beyond all creation, for she communed directly with God, Who came to abide in her womb. In witness to this the archangel cried out, “The Lord is with thee.” In Mary were fulfilled the words of Scripture: *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up* (Jas. 4:10). Thus the Lord showed that He originally created man capable of becoming a God-bearer; evil is foreign to our nature.

“Blessed art thou among women,” cried the angel, and Elizabeth took up his cry. Like Jael of old (Judg. 5:24), who destroyed the ferocious enemy Sisera by her cunning, so Mary overcame the ancient enemy of the human race. Whereas the former killed the enemy with a mallet and a stake while he was sleeping, the latter smote the devil by her humble acquiescence, which opened the Heavens and brought to us our Most Powerful God, who destroyed the dominion of death.

“Blessed is the fruit of thy womb,” we say, echoing the words of Elizabeth, for in Mary’s womb God was clothed in human nature. But God alone is worthy of blessing, for from Him proceed all good intentions for the universe. For this reason Scripture promises that the fruit of the womb of those who keep the covenant with God and fulfill His commandments will be blessed (Deut. 28:4). As a keeper of the Law the Theotokos was found worthy of blessing.

Here the Lord is called the Fruit of the womb, “because the conception occurred without a husband. Other infants are the progeny of fathers, but Christ is the fruit solely of the womb of the Mother of God, for she alone bore Him.”<sup>52</sup>

The final words of the prayer mention the reason for the Divine Incarnation: “Thou hast born the Saviour of our souls.” For only the Savior is able to wrest our indestructible souls from the corruption of sin and eternal destruction, and only He can enable us to relearn how to enliven our own bodies. This gift became possible through the Resurrection.

## Kontakion of the Akathist to the Theotokos

One of the best-loved hymns in honor of the Theotokos is the *kontakion* (a short hymn summarizing the main theme of a service) of the feast of the Annunciation. This hymn begins the *Great Akathist* to the Theotokos (an akathist is a hymn during the reading or singing of which sitting is not called for).

The prayer itself appeared under extremely tragic circumstances. In the year 626 the Persians and the Slavs surrounded Constantinople, the capital of the Orthodox empire. There could be no hope of survival. Patriarch Sergius took charge in the city, and gathered all the Christians in the church of Blachernae for nocturnal prayer. All that night the Orthodox prayed and

<sup>52</sup> Blessed Theophylact of Bularia, *Explanation of the Gospel of Luke*.

implored God to protect their city through the protection of the Most-pure Lady. In the morning the patriarch immersed the sash of the Ever-virgin into the sea, and immediately a storm arose which destroyed the enemy fleet. The city was saved, and in gratitude for their deliverance the patriarch wrote this hymn of thanksgiving to the Mother of God:

*“To thee, the Champion Leader, we thy servants dedicate a feast of victory and of thanksgiving as ones rescued out of sufferings, O Theotokos; but as thou art one with might which is invincible, from all dangers that can be do thou deliver us, that we may cry to thee: Rejoice, thou Bride Unwedded!”*

In simpler language this hymn would read as follows: “O Commander who fights for us, having been delivered from evil we your servants sing hymns of victory and gratitude to you, O Birthgiver of God. But as one who possesses power that cannot be defeated, deliver us from all possible misfortunes, that we may cry to you: rejoice, O Bride Unwedded.”

We call the Mother of God the “Champion Leader” because she, as the Queen of Heaven, fearfully punishes those who harm Christians and defends those who have become her children through Christ. She crushes all the plots of the devil and saves those who call upon her from every misfortune. There are numerous accounts of how those who have prayed this prayer have been saved from violence and death. The Mother of God has “might,” i.e., dominion or authority, that cannot be overcome, for it was received from the Creator. We call the Theotokos “Bride Unwedded” because she is the Mother who never knew a man. Her eternal virginity is the greatest adornment and glory of the world.

**The hymn “It Is Truly Meet”:** *“It is truly meet to bless thee, the Theotokos, ever-blessed and most blameless and Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word, the very Theotokos, thee do we magnify.”*

There is a very interesting story behind this especially beloved Christian hymn. Its second half, beginning with the words “More honorable than the Cherubim,” was written in the 7th century by St. Cosmas of Maiuma as an irmos (the opening hymn of the canon) for Great Friday.

In the late 10th century the archangel Gabriel appeared to a certain monk on Mount Athos while the latter was singing the morning service. The archangel appeared in the form of an ordinary monk, and when they began singing “More Honorable” together he said that where he came from the prayer was prefaced by the words, “It is truly meet....” The monk liked the hymn so much that he asked the archangel to write it down. However, no paper was to be found in the building. Then the archangel wrote the words of the hymn with his finger on a stone, which became soft as wax. Since that time this hymn has been sung not only in the depths of the Heavens, but also



in the churches. And the icon before which this hymn was first sung began to work miracles.

“It is truly meet and right” means that the glorification of Mary is in accordance with the truth, and not the result of anyone’s subjective will. The Mother of God is called “ever-blessed” because she shares in the eternal blessedness of the Lord; hence, according to Christ’s word, joy will never



depart from her. Mary is “most blameless” because her holiness exceeds the holiness of all creation, for the Holy Spirit cleansed her by His descent. Mary is called “more honorable than the Cherubim” (the most exalted of the spirits, who possess complete wisdom—Hez. 1) because she has become not just a servant to Christ, but His Mother, and hence she is beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim (the most exalted of the angels, who burn with love for God—Is. 6), as she whom the archangel Gabriel called “full of grace.” “Who without corruption gavest birth to God the Word”—Mary gave birth in the flesh to Him Who is the eternal Word of the Father and true God (Jn. 1:1–3), yet this birth did not violate the virginity of the Mother of God, and corruption did not touch her body. It is for this reason that she is called the very (i.e., authentic, real, genuine) Theotokos.

### PRAYER TO THE GUARDIAN ANGEL

**T**he Holy Church believes that every baptized Christian has a heavenly protector who guards him from all evil and helps him to do good works. He is called a guardian angel, and to him we turn for help.

O holy angel that standeth by my wretched soul and my passionate life, forsake not me a sinner, nor shrink from me because of mine intemperance. Give no place for the cunning demon to master me through the violence of my mortal body, strengthen my poor and feeble hand, and guide me in the way of salvation. Yea, O holy angel of God, guardian and protector of my wretched soul and body, forgive me all wherein I have offended thee all the days of my life; and if I have sinned during the past night, protect me during the present day, and guard me from every temptation of the enemy, that I may not anger God by any sin. And pray to the Lord for me, that He may establish me in His fear, and show me, His servant, to be worthy of His goodness. Amen.

### PRAYER TO THE SAINT WHOSE NAME WE BEAR

**O**ur heavenly patron, the saint whose name we bear and whose life we must emulate, is one of our most intimate defenders. The day this saint is commemorated is the most important personal feast of every Christian, called their “nameday.”

“Pray unto God for me O holy God-pleaser (Name), for I fervently flee unto thee, the speedy helper and intercessor for my soul.”

## Part IV

# WORSHIP: THE DIVINE SERVICES



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## COMMON AND PRIVATE WORSHIP

As we have already said, Christ does not save people singly, but as part of His Body, the Church (Eph. 5:23), in unity with all the saints (Eph. 2:18). It is no wonder then that prayer is likewise offered up not only by each Christian separately, but by the whole Church. In Old Testament times the commandment required that sacrifices be offered in one place (Deut. 12:10–14), and all men were to appear before the face of God three times a year (Ex. 23:17, Deut. 16:16–17). In the New Testament also the whole Church gathers together, in order to offer up prayer and thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father by the power of the Holy Spirit through Christ. It is for this reason that Christians do not limit themselves to private prayer alone, but raise their voices in sacrifice to God together, led by the priests.

Since this kind of prayer is a manifestation of mutual love between the children of God, the chief trait of Christ's disciples (Jn. 13:35), it calls down upon the worshipers a special blessing from the Creator. Without communion with other Christians it is difficult to receive the Divine gifts that the parishioners of a church receive. As Father Paul Florensky rightly said, a "Lord, have mercy" in church is of greater value than dozens of akathists at home. Even desert dwellers who had withdrawn from the world would hasten to the "assemblies of the faithful" to find relief in their struggle against it.



St. Onouphrius said that as the hart who has devoured a poisonous snake hastens to a spring, so the monk who wages war with the devil hastens to the temple each Saturday and Sunday, there to receive the living water of grace. Hence, those who withdraw from common prayer act most foolishly, violating the express decree of Scripture: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day* (Heb. 10:25).

## THE TEMPLE: CONSTRUCTION AND PURPOSE

The place where the children of God gather together to offer prayers and thanksgiving to the Heavenly Father is called the temple, or the church. For the Church gathers here around the Lord Who gives His own Self to us in the Holy Chalice. For this reason Christ Himself calls the temple the house of God the Father (Jn. 2:16) and a house of prayer (Mk. 11:17). According to the Church's belief, after the temple has been consecrated by the bishop (or an antimins consecrated by a bishop has been placed in it) the Spirit of God fills the sanctuary, and an angel stands guard at the altar. One should enter the church with prayer and remain therein with reverence and the fear of the Lord.

The very arrangement of the church reflects heavenly realities. For the Holy Spirit Who established the Church taught it all things (Jn. 14:26); hence, He also taught the Church how to properly serve God and worship Him. The apostle Peter also says that the Spirit is sent from the Heavens (1 Pet. 1:12); hence, our worship must also be of heavenly origin.

In the Old Testament God commanded Moses to build Him a portable temple, the tabernacle. The prophet was to follow the heavenly patterns to the letter: *And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it* (Ex. 25:8–9). Though at that time they merely served as *the example and shadow of heavenly things* (Heb. 8:5), in order for God to receive men's prayers it was nevertheless necessary to arrange everything according to the laws not of earth, but of Heaven. Then, following this same pattern, the Temple of Solomon was created (1 Kings 6–8), and the Spirit of God hallowed it. When Christ came *by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building* (Heb. 9:11), the Church established by Him built temples for itself following the heavenly pattern.

The prototype of our temples was seen by the great prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel and the apostle John (Is. 6:1–10; Ez. 40–43; Rev. 4:1–6, 11:1). The fathers of the Church (Andrew of Cesarea, Methodius of Patara, Maximus the Confessor, and others) asserted that this was the heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly Church of the righteous, after which the earthly Church is patterned. Hence, the temple symbolizes the Ecumenical Church, the peace of God, and even the individual person (1 Cor. 6:19).

The outward appearance of the temple varies. There is the basilica, which symbolizes the ship of salvation, the new Noah's Ark; the cross-shaped temple with onion domes common to Russia, which shows that we ascend to Heaven by the weapon of the Cross; and the circular temple, symbolizing eternity. The church is crowned with the Life-giving Tree of the Cross—the trophy of Christ's victory. The place where the Church assembles is adorned with a cross, in fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah: *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time ... And He shall set up an ensign for the nations* (Is. 11:10–12). The most-wise King Solomon likewise foresaw this when he spoke of the Orthodox Church as being *terrible as an army with banners* (Song of Sol. 6:4).

The dome crowning the temple roof is a symbol of Christ, the Head of the Church. The cylinder beneath the dome is the neck connecting the head and the body, the symbol of the apostles and their successors, through whom the Orthodox have communion with Christ. As St. John the Theologian writes concerning this, *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ* (1 Jn. 1:3). Without the direct apostolic succession preserved by the Orthodox Church, communion with God is impossible.

Frequently the temple has four other smaller domes, symbolizing the four evangelists, through whom the image and teaching of the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus, have come down to us. To show the distinction of the disciples from the Teacher, the main dome is covered with gold, a symbol of the Kingdom and incorruption (this is why the wise men brought gold as a gift to the Infant Christ). The domes depicting the evangelists are the color of the starry skies, as a reminder of the words of the prophet Daniel: *And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever* (Dan. 12:3). The number of domes may vary. For example, three domes symbolize the Trinity, five symbolize Christ and the four evangelists, and thirteen symbolize Christ and the apostles.

The arched gables, reminiscent of the traditional Russian women's *koko-shnik* headdress, are a symbol of the angelic hosts. The windows are an image of the incomplete Revelation currently accessible to us (1 Cor. 13:9). This sym-

bolism has its roots in the Bible, for: ... *behold, He standeth behind our wall*, the Church Bride says of Christ; *He looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice* (Song of Sol. 2:9). Another ancient element of the temple's external decor is the pillars, modeled after the pillars of the tabernacle (Ex. 26) and symbolizing the saints and the angels, by whose prayers the world exists (Gal. 2:9).

The Orthodox have firmly assimilated the words of the apostle: *But ye are come unto mount Sion* [hence the mountain-shaped roof of the temple], *and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven* [this assembly of angels and men is depicted by the gables], *and to God the Judge of all* [symbolized by the dome], *and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel* [all this is found in the Orthodox altar] (Heb. 12:22-24).

These words of Scripture are depicted in the language of symbols in the temple. All the elements of church decor have their origins in Old Testament times: *And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures*



*of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, within and without* (1 Kings 6:29). It is this biblical tradition that is frequently reflected in the frescos on the church walls. The pictures and symbols show that the temple the Lord restores to us Paradise which was lost.

People are summoned to the start of the service with a bell. When the Hebrews were wandering in the Egyptian desert God commanded Moses to make two silver trumpets to call the faithful to offer whole-burnt offerings, and said that this would *be to you for a memorial before your God* (Num. 10:10). So also the Orthodox are summoned to morning and evening service to the Lord by the sound of bells, which serve in place of trumpets. Thus are fulfilled the words of the psalm: *Praise Him with tuneful cymbals, praise Him with cymbals of jubilation* (Ps. 150:5). The Orthodox Church believes that the sound of a blessed bell is linked to the uncreated power of the Divinity, and hence is able to drive away evil spirits, as the sound of David's harp drove them away from King Saul (1 Sam. 16:23). Those who hear them ringing are filled with the grace of the Spirit, as occurred with the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 3:15).

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The temple doors are a sign of righteousness, as King David said: *Open unto me the gates of righteousness; I will enter therein and give thanks unto the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter in thereat* (Ps. 117:19–20). In the Orthodox temple, in addition to its practical purpose every object has a spiritual meaning that ennobles a person.

As in the Old Testament, to this day the temple consists of three parts: the narthex, the ship (the temple or nave), and the altar. The first part is called the narthex today; prior to the Lord's coming it was called the church courtyard. In pre-Christ antiquity it was here that the altar stood on which all the faithful could offer sacrifices to the Creator. Today the narthex is occupied by the catechumens (those preparing for baptism), as well as those barred from Communion for their sins. The narthex symbolizes our body in subjection to the soul. Here penitential prayers (the litiya) are offered and the hours are read.

Frequently the *panikhida table*, a table for commemorating the departed, on which candles are lit as a symbol of our prayer for them, is located in the narthex. Before this table, as before a symbolical grave (hence the Holy Cross by which we were given the hope of resurrection, which stands on the panikhida table) the Church burns incense and offers prayers for our departed brethren. Beside it people place the offerings they bring as alms offered on behalf of their loved ones. All this is a manifestation of our love, which *never faileth* (1 Cor. 13:8). *For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's* (Rom. 14:8). The prayers of the Church have great power for the departed, who are no longer able to do anything for themselves.

The second part of the temple—the *nave* (*from the Latin, meaning “ship”*)—corresponds to the Old Testament sanctuary in which the priests served God. Today it is the place where all faithful children of the Church stand, who through chrismation have become a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). They offer a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God (1 Pet. 2:5), a sacrifice of praise. It is here that the better part of the service takes place. The nave symbolizes the earthly Church, man’s soul and our earth. It is no accident that as in the Old Testament the tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon were filled with depictions of cherubim, so also in the New Testament the Orthodox temple is filled with sacred images. For the Invisible Son become visible, and confessing this truth in deed we depict God Who became incarnate. *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him* (Jn. 1:18). We also manifest this wondrous message not only in word, but in deed. We fulfill the commandment of the apostle Paul to the letter: ... *let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:1–2). As the Lord’s redemption has brought much fruit, the temples contain many depictions of those equal to the angels (Lk. 20:36, Acts 6:15)—the saints who have become sons of God by grace (Jn. 1:12–13). They have received the glory that the Father gave the Son, which the Son in turn passed on to the saints (Jn. 17:22), who are depicted with halos as a symbol of the image of Divine glory, for *God is light* (1 Jn. 1:5). We too, contemplating the end of their lives, imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7), as the apostle Paul exhorts us.

The economy of our salvation is depicted with particular clarity on the *iconostasis*, a special wall of several rows of icons that separates the nave from the altar. The concept of the iconostasis comes from the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 6:16, 29:31–32). If we look at the iconostasis from top to bottom, in the themes of the icons we see how God created the world, called the patriarchs, sent prophets, appeared on earth and saved us, and will come once again to judge the world in righteousness.

In this wall there are three doors: the central doors (called the *royal doors*, since Christ the King Himself passes through them) and the side doors (called the *deacon’s doors*, leading to the side partitions of the altar). Above the royal doors the Last Supper is depicted, at which the Lord established the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We believe that this Supper is continued at every Liturgy. The royal doors themselves are adorned with a depiction of the Annunciation, when God became a man, and icons of the evangelists who proclaimed this to us. Sometimes icons of the holy authors of the texts of the Divine Liturgies are also placed here—John Chrysostom and Basil the Great. It should be noted that there is also a prototype of the royal doors in heaven. The apostle John had this vision: *Behold, a door was opened in*

*heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter* (Rev. 4:1).

To each side of the royal doors stand icons of Christ and the Theotokos, testifying to God's true incarnation, as well as an image of the saint or feast to which the temple is dedicated. On the side doors are depicted God's servants, either in heaven (the angels) or on earth (the sacred deacons). Sometimes icons of the Old Testament prototypes of our own priesthood, Aaron and Melchizedek, are placed here. Behind the royal doors hangs the curtain, also called the *katapetasma*. This dates back to the tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon (Ex. 26, 1 Kings), and it symbolizes the flesh of Christ, through which we are able to see the boundless radiance of the Divinity, which man would otherwise be unable to endure (Heb. 10:20).

Before the iconostasis there is an elevated portion called the *soleas*, intended for the clergy. In front of the royal doors the soleas protrudes outward, forming the *ambon*, on which the Gospel is read. The ambon symbolizes the stone from which the angel proclaimed the Resurrection of Christ to the myrrh-bearing women.

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The third and most sacred part of the temple is the *altar* (from the Latin word meaning "high table of sacrifice")—a symbol of the heavens, of paradise lost, and of our mind made pure by grace. In the altar the most important sacred rites are performed: the priest offers intercessions, incense is burned, and—most importantly—the sacred Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood is offered.

The chief sacred object in the altar is the *holy table or throne*, so called because upon it Christ the Savior Himself invisibly abides in His Body and Blood. This is the altar upon which the Bloodless Sacrifice of the Liturgy is offered. It is a symbol of the Lord, Who is the cleansing of all our sins. The prototype of this sacred heart of the temple is in the heavens: beneath the altar the apostle John beheld the souls of the martyrs (Rev. 6:9), and as a reminder of this the relics of the martyrs rest beneath the holy table.

On earth since the time of Adam God has deigned to manifest His particular presence where sacrificial offerings were made (Gen. 4:4). At an altar He revealed Himself to Noah (Gen. 8:20–21), Abraham (Gen. 5:7–21), and Jacob (Gen. 35, 1:7–15). It was for offering sacrifices that He commanded that the tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon be built, which He sanctified by His uncreated glory, manifested in the form of a cloud (Ex. 40:34, 1 Kings 8:10). In the Church the holy apostles made it the rule that altars should be erected. *We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle*, writes the apostle Paul (Heb. 13:10).

The holy table is draped with *coverings* that symbolize the burial shroud of Christ and His eternal glory. Upon it lies a special sacred cloth, called the



*antimins* (from the Greek, meaning “in place of the altar”), which signifies the bishop’s permission to serve the Liturgy at the given church. The antimins, like the holy table, is consecrated through anointing with holy chrism (as it was in the Old Testament—Ex. 30:22–29), and particles of holy relics are sewn into it.

In the Old Testament, the chief holy object in the altar was the Ark of the Covenant, which the evangelist John also saw in his vision. We have a similar sacred object, upon the holy table: this is the *tabernacle*, which is shaped like a church, and the main part of which is a repository that holds the Body of Christ, the prototype of the manna (Jn. 6:49–51) that was kept before the Ark of the Old Testament (Ex. 16:32–34).

The most important thing contained in the Ark was the Tablets of the Law (Ex. 25:21). In the heavenly temple also He Who sits upon the Throne<sup>53</sup> held in His right hand a book sealed with seven seals, which the slain Lamb removed (Rev. 5), and from the sacrificial altar God reveals His will to the angels in the heavens (Rev. 9:13, 16:7). Hence, in the temple upon the holy table lies the *Holy Gospel*—the new Tablets of the Law and the open book of God’s fates.

Before the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle lay the rod of Aaron which blossomed (17:10). On our altar lies the incomparably greater standard of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30)—the Life-giving *Cross*, upon which God Himself established the new priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, which surpassed the priesthood of Aaron (Heb. 7).

Behind the altar there is an elevated area called the *high place*. On it stands the bishop’s throne, which is flanked by seats for the priests. The bishop’s place symbolizes the throne of God, and the priests’ seats—the thrones of the 24 elders of the Apocalypse (Rev. 4:2–4).

Before the high place burns a seven-branched candlestick—a lamp with seven lampadas, depicting the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit. The apostle writes: *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God* (Rev. 4:5).

To the right of the holy table (to the left when facing it) stands the *table of oblation* (sometimes also called the *prothesis*). It symbolizes the manger in Bethlehem, and also Golgotha. On this table the bread and the wine are prepared for Communion, and the Holy Gifts are consumed after the Liturgy. Here also slips with the names of Christians living and departed are read.

Beside it there is a vessel with water for washing before Communion. This water symbolizes the “sea” within the Temple of Solomon, and the sea of glass contemplated in the heavens (Rev. 4:6).

The left side of the altar is called the *diaconicon*. Here sacred items are kept: vestments, sacred vessels, the altar Gospel book, crosses, etc.

<sup>53</sup> In Russian the word for “throne” and “altar” is the same (*prestol*)—*Trans*.



Such is the arrangement of the house of God, in which the Church sends up prayers to the Heavenly Father, where rational and bloodless sacrifices are offered up to God, where people are born to heavenly life. Truly, the temple is so dear to Christians that *better is one day in Thy courts than thousands elsewhere. I have chosen rather to be an outcast in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of sinners* (Ps. 83:11).

## THE CLERGY

As in the Old Testament God commanded the high priests, priests, and Levites to perform the services, so also in the New Testament at the Lord's command worship in the temples is led by the clergy, who have received this gift of the Holy Spirit through being ordained by a successor of the apostles: the bishop.

As has been said above, the bishop (from the Greek, meaning "over-seer") presides over the assembly of the Church in a specific locality. He wields the fullness of church authority—to judge, to teach, and to perform the sacraments. Only the bishop can ordain a priest or a deacon and consecrate temples and chrism. He is subject to the authority of the local council of bishops, which in turn is subject to the Ecumenical Council.

The priest (or presbyter, from the Greek, meaning "elder") performs all the sacraments except for ordination, and preaches. The deacon (from the Greek, meaning "server") assists the bishop and the priest at the divine services, but has no authority to perform the sacraments.

The authority of the priest and the deacon is not dependent on their individual sanctity, though they are particularly called by God to perfection. Just as a wire carries a signal so long as it is unbroken, however grimy it may become, so also the priest is able to perform the sacred rites unless the Church has revoked his right to do so. The sacraments and services of the Church are based not on individual righteousness, which is always imperfect, but on God's grace.

There was once a certain monk living in the desert, and a priest would come to commune him. One day the monk learned that the priest communing him was a fornicator. At this he refused to be communed by him. That same night, however, he received a revelation in a dream: he saw a gold well with crystal-clear water, from which a leper was drawing water with a bucket, also of gold. And the voice of God said: "Behold how the water remains clean, though it is served by a leper. In the same way grace is not dependent on the one through whom it is bestowed." After this the desert-dweller began again to commune from the priest, without questioning whether he was righteous or a sinner.

## VESTMENTS

Just as various professions have their professional uniforms, so also God has given the Church special vestments for worship. Even in Moses' tabernacle the Lord commanded that sacred garments be made for glory and majesty (Ex. 28:2). The heavenly elders are clothed not in ordinary clothing, but in special robes. These robes serve as the model for the sacred clothing worn by Orthodox priests. After Christ's coming His grace rested upon His garments as well, and the sick who touched them were healed. The same occurred with those who touched the garments of the apostles. It is no accident that the apostles decreed that special sacred garments be worn in the Church for worship (2 Tim. 4:18).

Each rank of the hierarchy possesses the gift of the rank below it, and therefore wears the vesture appropriate to it as well. The sacred vesture of the deacon is comprised of the sticharion, orarion, cuffs, and belt.

The *sticharion* (a long, straight, ankle-length robe) symbolizes a pure and blameless life and the grace of God this produces.

The *orarion* (from the Greek verb *oro*, "I look, I guard, I observe," and the Latin words *orarium*—"towel," "lention," and *ora*—"prayer") is a strip hanging from the deacon's left shoulder, symbolizing angelic wings, for this ecclesiastical rank performs the angelic ministry, and in raising the end of the orarion it summons all Christians to pray in fellowship with the angels.

The *cuffs* remind us that God Himself acts through the hands of the clergy. They likewise symbolize the fetters that were on the Lord's hands before His execution.

The vestments particular to the priest are the epitachelion, phelonion, cuffs, and belt. Priests who have been awarded the navedrennik or the epigonation, the kamilavkion, or the mitre wear these, as well.

The first vestment of the priest is the *epitachelion* (meaning "worn around the neck")—a doubled orarion, signifying the double grace of the priesthood and symbolizing the rope with which Christ was led to death. Without the epitachelion no service may be performed.

The second vesture of the priest is the *belt*, the sign of the Lord's strengthening power that crushes the enemy.

The *navedrennik* (a square of cloth on the priest's thigh) is the spiritual shield. This vestment is an award for priestly merit. The bishop's epigonation shares this same symbolism.

The *phelonian* (a sleeveless cloak) symbolizes the purple in which the Roman soldiers robed Christ. This vestment is donned at the most solemn services.

The vestments peculiar to the bishop are the omophorion, sakkos, mitre, epigonation, panagia, and staff.

The *sakkos* (from the Hebrew for “sackcloth”) is a special garment resembling a sticharion. It shares the same symbolism as the phelonion. Until the 17th century nearly all bishops except for patriarchs wore the phelonion.

The *omophorion* (a special wide band worn on the shoulders) signifies the lost sheep that the good Shepherd took upon his shoulders and brought to the Father (Lk. 15:4–7).

The *mitre* (a special crown) symbolizes the golden crowns of the elders in heaven and reminds us of the crown of thorns worn by the crucified Christ.

The *panagia* (from the Greek, meaning “all-holy”) is a round icon of the Theotokos worn on the bishop’s chest.

The *staff* (or crosier) is a symbol of pastoral authority over the flock, and portrays the bishop’s obligation to draw unbelievers to God, to shepherd Christians, and to punish apostates.

When no particularly solemn service is being served, the bishop dons the *mantle* (a special sleeveless cloak), embodying the angelic wings and the all-overshadowing power of God.



## TYPES OF DIVINE SERVICE

In Orthodoxy services are divided into those in which the whole community of Christians takes part, called *common services*, and those performed for specific individuals, called *private services*, or *services of need*.

The basic principle formulating daily worship is the cycle of sacred time. Common services consist of prayers that comprise several such cycles. The cycles of services that collectively comprise our worship are the daily, weekly, yearly, and paschal cycles.

### The Daily Cycle

The daily cycle of services, traditionally ascribed to King David (Ps. 118:164), includes seven liturgical rites for sanctifying all of time. According to the Order of Services they are performed the same way each day of the year. The texts for these prayer services are printed in the Horologion.

The sanctification of a particular time of day is connected to the particular sacred event concerning our salvation that occurred at that hour. In the temple the heavenly and the earthly, the eternal and the temporal, meet, and it is the points at which they meet that form the divine services.

Since God created the world in the evening, the first service of the coming day is *vespers*, which is served at sunset. It reminds us of Christ's burial in the evening on Great Friday and of our own end. As St. Symeon of Thessalonica says, at vespers "we glorify the Creator in that we have reached the end of the day, and we desire to consecrate its remainder to God. Likewise we give thanks for our life, our food, our thoughts, words, and deeds; we ask for a peaceful, sinless night, free from temptations, preparing us for the end of our life, since death comes upon us like the night."<sup>54</sup>

After supper *compline* is served. At this service we recall Christ's descent into hades. There is *great compline* (served during fasts and on the eves of Nativity and Theophany) and *small compline* (served at all other times).

Late at night we serve the *midnight office*, awaiting the coming of Christ the Judge and recalling His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and His condemnation by the priests. The midnight office varies depending on whether it is served on a weekday, on Saturday, or on Sunday.

At daybreak *matins* is sung, reminding us of Christ's Nativity and Resurrection. In the words of St. Symeon, it is served "in honor of daybreak

<sup>54</sup> St. Symeon of Thessalonica, *Talk on the Sacred Rites and the Sacraments of the Church*, 264.

and to give thanks to Him Who brought forth the light, dispelled the darkness of delusion, and sent down to us the light of piety.”<sup>55</sup> Appended to matins is the *first hour*. (It should be noted that liturgical time is counted beginning with the rising of the sun in the morning and its setting in the evening.)

The *third hour* is consecrated to the remembrance of the descent of the Holy Spirit.

The *sixth hour* reminds us of the Crucified Savior and the coming of darkness. Usually after the reading of the sixth hour the Divine Liturgy is served, but the Liturgy is not included in the daily cycle of services, for in it we are united with Him Who now lives outside the bounds of time.

Finally, the last service of the daily cycle is the *ninth hour*, when the Lord died upon the Cross for our sins.

All these services are not performed in the churches only. It is most beneficial for every Christian to offer thanksgiving to the Creator at these hours. When St. Macrina was dying, as evening came a lighted lamp was brought in. Upon seeing the light, with the last of her strength she propped herself up on one elbow and began singing a vespral hymn, and with these words she passed into the other world, there to continue eternally giving thanks together with the angels.

## The Weekly Cycle

The next cycle of services is called the weekly cycle. It includes special prayers printed in a book called the *Ochtoechos* (the “Book of the Eight Tones”), which vary according to the day of the week depending on the appointed melody, or tone. These sacred texts are repeated once every eight weeks, beginning on the day of Holy Pascha. The number eight itself, upon which the melodic system of the tones is based, is a symbol of eternity, which will begin when the world ends. Our singing itself has its origins in the heavenly music of the angels.

The first day of the Orthodox week is Sunday (called *nedelya* in Slavonic, meaning a day when no work is done, since all work is prohibited), the day when God created the world and lit the light, and revealed to us the mystery of Christ’s Resurrection. On this day all Christians gather in the temples to glorify the resurrected Creator.

The second day of the week, *Monday*, is consecrated to the memory of the Heavenly Bodiless Hosts.

<sup>55</sup> Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, *Talk on the Sacred Rites and the Sacraments of the Church*, 264.

On *Tuesday* we commemorate Holy Prophet John the Baptist.

*Wednesday* is consecrated to the Theotokos and the Holy Cross. On this day we fast, remembering Judas' betrayal.

On *Thursday* we remember the holy apostles and Saint Nicholas of Myra and Lycia.

*Friday* is the day of the Crucifixion, consecrated to veneration of the Holy Cross. It is a fast day.

*Saturday* is the day when God rested, a lesser feast, consecrated to the memory of all the saints and commemoration of the departed.

## The All-night Vigil

Before the most important feasts, as well as before each Sunday, a special service is held in the churches, called *the All-night Vigil*, comprised of great vespers, matins, and the first hour combined. According to the Order of Services it is to last all night.

Before the service begins the priest and the deacon silently cense the church with the royal doors open, as a reminder of the Spirit of God that moved upon the surface of the waters on the first day of creation. The service begins with a glorification of the consubstantial Trinity, after which we bow down thrice before God and sing Psalm 103 (the *opening psalm*), which describes the great wonder of the creation of the universe. Upon completion of the censuring the royal doors are closed, reminding us of our forebears' fall into sin, and the priest reads the lamplighting prayers, as a mediator for sinners.

The deacon pronounces the *great ectenia* (or *ectenian of peace*)—a series of invitations to the people to pray for the whole world. The choir sings the first psalms (Psalms 1–8 on Sunday, 1–3 on other feasts), describing the path of fallen mankind.

After this, four psalms are sung that describe man's search for God's salvation (140, 141, 129, and 116). They begin with the words, "**Lord, I have cried unto Thee, hearken unto me.**" At this time the deacon censes the church, as a symbol of our prayer. Certain verses of these psalms are followed by special prayers called *stichera*, dedicated to the approaching feast.

After the singing of the *stichera* the *vespral entry* takes place with candles and censuring. It symbolizes the appearance of the Savior Who descended from the Heavens. The choir sings the evening hymn: "**O Gentle Light of the holy glory of the immortal, heavenly, holy, blessed Father, O Jesus Christ: having come to the setting of the sun, having beheld the evening light, we praise the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: God. Meet it is for Thee at all**

times to be hymned with reverent voices, O Son of God, Giver of life. Wherefore, the world doth glorify Thee.”

After the singing of this hymn the deacon intones the *prokeimenon* (“that which lies ahead”), a series of psalm verses preceding the reading of Scripture. When there is a festal service, the *paremias* (excerpts from Holy Scripture) are read. The deacon intones the *litany of fervent supplication*, the evening doxology is sung, and the deacon again intones the *litany of supplication*. The priest goes into the narthex of the temple, where the *litiya* (fervent prayer) is served, symbolizing the Lord’s descent to the bottom of hades. After this the choir sings the stichera at the aposticha (i.e., alternating with verses from the Bible), and the hymn of Symeon the Godbearer is read. The coming night reminds us of our approaching death, which is to be met with the words of the righteous Symeon. Following the reading of the Lord’s Prayer the troparion of the feast is sung (on Sundays, the song to the Theotokos). In the center of the church a vessel is placed containing five loaves, wheat, wine, and oil, in remembrance of the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves worked by the Lord. The deacon censes the loaves, and the priest blesses this food.

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After the singing of Psalm 33 the Six Psalms are read (Psalms 3, 37, 62, 87, 102, and 142), symbolizing the Last Judgment. This is a special moment in the service, and requires particular attention. For the reading of the Six Psalms the candles and lamps are extinguished. During this time not only talking is prohibited, but even making the sign of the cross, lest the sound of clothes rustling distract others from the reading. Christians stand, as it were, before the face of the Judge and ask forgiveness for their transgressions. This beginning of matins symbolizes the sorrow of the Old Testament righteous ones and the Nativity of Christ that has saved them from destruction. After the third psalm the priest leaves the altar and reads the morning prayers before the royal doors. After the end of the Six Psalms the deacon intones the great ectenia, followed by the verses: “God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” proclaiming the appearance of Christ and His Resurrection. Signifying this, the candles and lamps are relit. The choir sings the troparion of the feast, and the *kathismata* are read (the Psalter is divided into twenty parts, each of which is called a *kathisma*).

Now comes the most important point of the All-night Vigil. The royal doors open, and to the singing of Psalms 134 and 135 (called the *polyeleos*—“great mercy” or “great illumination”) the priests go out into the center of the church. With a lighted candle the church rector censes the church. If a feast is being celebrated, all sing the megalynarion of the feast, followed by the *antiphons* or hymns of ascent (hymns sung by two choirs alternating), which



raise us up to the peak of the service. After the prokeimenon the rector reads the Gospel, which proclaims the Resurrection of Christ, or else leads us into the very heart of the given feast. At a Sunday vigil all the Christians sing the hymn to the Risen Lord and kiss the Holy Gospel. On feast days they kiss the icon of the feast or the saint. After this the priest anoints the Christians with oil, making them participants in the joy of the feast.

At this time the festal *canon* is read or sung. This is a specially structured hymn that usually consists of eight parts, called *odes*. In this hymn the meaning of the feast or the greatness of the saint is revealed to the fullest extent; hence, the canon and the reading of Scripture are the highlight of the All-night Vigil. At matins the canon is sung as a refrain to the biblical odes—ten poetic excerpts from the Bible. The first ode is Moses' hymn after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1–19). The second is Moses' rebuke to the Hebrews in the wilderness (Deut. 32:1–44; due to its severe nature it is sung only during Great Lent). The third is that of Anna, the mother of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 2). The fourth is that of the prophet Habakkuk (Hab. 3:2–19). The fifth is that of the prophet Isaiah (Is. 26:9–20). The sixth is that of the prophet Jonah, from the belly of the whale (Jon. 2:1–7). The seventh and eighth odes are the thanksgiving of the three youths from within the furnace (Dan. 3:26–72). The ninth ode is that of the Theotokos (Lk. 1:46–55), during which the whole church is censed, symbolizing the Holy Spirit that sanctified the Theotokos. The tenth ode is that of the prophet Zechariah (Lk. 1:68–79). Thus, before the Christians' eyes all of sacred history unfolds, from Exodus to the appearance of John the Baptist, the last of the prophets.

The singing of the canon is interspersed with ectenias (after the third, sixth, and ninth odes) and the singing of *sedalia*, *kontakia* and *ikoi* (special short prayers disclosing the essence of the feast).

After the canon the *sedalia* are read, signifying the appearance of the Light of Christ to perishing sinners, and the cosmic glorification of God is begun in the *psalms of praise* (148, 149, 150). These psalms are interspersed with the *stichera at the praises*, preparing us for the most majestic glorification of God—the great doxology. The royal doors are opened, and the priest exclaims, “*Glory to Thee Who hast shown us the light!*” The choir responds with an exalted hymn, the text of which dates back to apostolic times. In ancient times the great doxology would be sung when the first rays of the sun were visible. After this exalted hymn, concluded by the angels' hymn and hymns in honor of the Resurrected Christ, the ectenias of supplication and of fervent supplication are intoned, matins is concluded, and the first hour begins. Thus Christians glorify God each Sunday for the great works He has done for our salvation.

## The Yearly Cycle

The Orthodox year for fixed (immovable) feasts begins not on January 1, as in the world, but on September 1. Naturally, these dates are given according to the Old Calendar. In the Churches of Russia, Jerusalem, Georgia, and Serbia the Julian calendar is observed, which currently differs from the secular (Gregorian) calendar by 13 days. Other local churches observe the “new Julian” calendar, which for the last several decades has coincided with the Gregorian calendar. The reason for which our churches do not wish to give up their calendar is obvious. Our service order is a highly complex work of art, and changing its structure would only ruin the majestic perfection of this “symphony performed by men, angels, and the elements” (as expressed by Fr. Pavel Florensky), created with the participation of the Holy Spirit.

The tradition of celebrating the autumn New Year originates in Holy Scripture (Lev. 23:24–25, Num. 10:9, 29:1–6). At that time there was a civil New Year—the Day of Trumpets—and a sacred new year related to the feast of Passover (Ex. 12:2). Our Orthodox calendar is similarly arranged. All the liturgical texts of the yearly cycle are taken from a book called the *Menaion* (from the Greek word for month).

Thus, on **September 1** we celebrate New Year’s Day, on which we give thanks to God the Creator for having preserved us in the past, and ask Him to bless us for new labors of piety. This day is also called the *Indiction* (from the word *indictio*—“levying of tribute”—because this was the time when the tax collection would begin).

On the eve of this day a festal vespers service is sung, at which three *paremias* are read (excerpts from the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament), describing God’s actions throughout history (Is. 61:1–9, Lev. 26:3–20, 22, 33, 40–41; Wisd. 4:7–15). On New Year’s Day itself at the festal Liturgy we recall Christ’s preaching in Nazareth (1 Tim. 2:1–7; Lk. 4:16–22).

On **September 21** the Church celebrates the great feast of the *Nativity of the Theotokos*. All Christians assemble in the churches to glorify the newborn Lady. At the All-night Vigil prophecies concerning the Mother of God (Gen. 28:10–17, Ezek. 43:27, 44:1–4; Wisd. 9:1–11). These sacred texts are also read at other feasts of the Theotokos. Having glorified the Mother of God and her parents, the priest reads the Gospel passage concerning the eternal glory of Mary (Lk. 1:39–49, 56). This same reading is used for all other feasts of the Theotokos. At the Liturgy we recall the Divine Incarnation, the facilitation of which was the chief work of the Most-pure One. This comprises the theme of the epistle and Gospel readings (Philip. 2:5–11, Lk. 10:38–42, 11:27–28), which are also read at many feasts of the Theotokos. This feast is

precipitated by a one-day forefeast, and we celebrate it for five days (until September 12).

On **September 27** we celebrate the great feast of the Lord known as the *Exaltation of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord*. Since on this day we recall the sufferings of Christ the Savior, in honor thereof we maintain a strict fast. At the All-night Vigil the prophecies concerning the Cross are read (Ex. 15:22–27, Wisd. 3:11–18, Ex. 60:11–16). On the holy table the Life-giving Cross is placed adorned with flowers, with a candle placed before it; hence, all the sacred rites are performed in the altar. There the Gospel account of the Lord's glory manifested upon the Cross is read (Jn. 12:28–36). Following the great doxology the Holy Cross is carried through the north doors of the altar (symbolizing Christ's humiliation on Golgotha), surrounded by a cloud of incense. In many churches the solemn rite of the Exaltation of the Cross is performed, in which the Cross is lifted up and sweet perfumes are poured over it. All the people bow down before God Crucified upon it, then kiss the Life-giving Tree.

At the festal Liturgy festal antiphons are sung, taken from the prophetic psalms. Instead of the Trisagion the hymn to the Cross is sung: “**Before Thy cross we bow down in worship, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify.**” New Testament passages are read concerning the glory of the cross and the sufferings of the God-man (1 Cor. 1:18–24, Jn. 19:6–11, 13–20, 25–28, 30–35).

The Church begins preparing for this feast on August 14, at which time the katavasia (the final irmoi of festal canons) of the Exaltation are sung: “**Inscribing the Cross upon the waters.**” The feast of the Restoration of the Temple of the Resurrection in Jerusalem (September 26) in particular serves to prepare us for this feast. The feast itself has a seven-day afterfeast (lasting until October 4).

On **October 14** the Russian Church celebrates the *Protection of the Theotokos*.

On **November 21** we celebrate the *Synaxis of the Archangel Michael and All the Heavenly Hosts* (on a day symbolizing eternity, the eighth, and in the ninth month, according to the number of the Heavenly Hosts). At the All-night Vigil biblical passages are read concerning the appearances of angels (Josh. 5:13–15, Judg. 6:2, 7:11–24; Is. 14:7–20) and their care for men (Mt. 13:24–30). At the Liturgy, words of Scripture regarding the service of the angels are read (Heb. 2:2–10, Lk. 10:16–21).

On **November 28** the forty-day *Nativity Fast* begins. This is not a strict fast. Up until December 20 fish may be eaten (on Saturdays, Sundays, and feasts according the Order of Services, but in practice on all days except for Wednesday and Friday).

On **December 4** the Church celebrates the great feast of the *Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos*. The All-night Vigil particularly em-

phasizes the significance of the Old Testament worship in the temple, which prefigured the service of the Mother of God. This also dictates the selection of liturgical readings describing the glory of God that came to rest upon the sanctuary of old (Ex. 40:1–5, 9–10; 16:34–35; 1 Kings 7:51, 8:1, 3–7, 9–11; Ezek. 43:27, 44:1–4). The same is true of the epistle reading at the Liturgy (Heb. 9:1–7). The Gospel reading is the usual reading for the Theotokos: Lk. 1:39–49, 56 (vigil) and Lk. 10:38–42, 11:27–28 (Liturgy). Beginning with this feast the Nativity katavasia is sung in the churches: “**Christ is born, give ye glory.**” Thus, a week into the fast we can already see the rays of the approaching feast shining through. The Entry has a one-day forefast and a four-day afterfeast.

On **December 13** we celebrate the memory of Holy Apostle *Andrew the First-called*.

**December 19** is the commemoration of *Saint Nicholas*.

The two Sundays before Christ’s Nativity (*of the Forefathers* and *of the Fathers*) are dedicated to the commemoration of the noble righteous ones of the Old Testament, whose labors made the Divine Incarnation possible.

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**January 2–5** the forefast of Christ’s Nativity begins. On these days the fast intensifies; fish may no longer be eaten. But the services also take on an unusual tone: at compline canons are read that mirror the canons of Passion Week, for Christ was born in order to offer Himself in Sacrifice for men. At matins the exquisite stichera of Saint Roman the Melodist are sung. Everything is preparing us for the arrival of the feast.

In Slavonic the eve of Nativity is called *sochelnik*, because on this day after the end of Liturgy only *sochivo* may be eaten (wheat boiled with honey). In Russia this one-day fast is called “the fast until the star,” in remembrance of the star of Bethlehem that led the wise men to the manger of the Divine Infant.

In the morning the *royal hours* are read in the churches (so called because in former times the emperor was always present). At this service we recall the prophecies concerning the Coming of Christ and the excerpts from the New Testament concerning the Divine Incarnation and the eternal existence of God the Son. (First hour: Heb. 1:1–12 and Mt. 1:18–25. Third hour: Gal. 3:23–29 and Lk. 2:1–20. Sixth hour: Heb. 1:2–3 and Mt. 2:1–12. Ninth hour: Heb. 2:11–18 and Mt. 2:13–23).

In the middle of the day the *vespers of Nativity with the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great* is served, at which eight paramias are read concerning the Lord’s Coming (Gen. 1:1–13, Num. 24:2–3, 5–9, 17–18; Mic. 4:6–7, 5:2–4; Is. 11:1–10; Bar. 3:36–38, 4:1–4; Dan. 2:31–36, 44–45; Is. 9:6–7, 7:10–16, 8:1–4, 8–10). These readings are interspersed by two joyous hymns in honor of the Lord Who is being born.

After the end of the paramias, accounts are read concerning Christ’s eternal existence (Heb. 1:1–12) and His Birth (Lk. 2:1–20). After the end of the

service a candle is brought out, symbolizing the star of Bethlehem, and the troparion and kontakion of the feast are sung for the first time.

If the eve of Nativity or Theophany falls on Saturday or Sunday, the royal hours are read on Friday, and the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom is served on the morning of the eve itself, after which the festal vespers is served. The solemn Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great is then served on the feast itself.



In the evening all Christians gather in the church, which is adorned with fir boughs, for the All-night Vigil, which begins with Great Compline. The song of Isaiah is triumphantly sung, proclaiming that God is now with us, and we have nothing to fear. At matins the Gospel is read concerning the actual Birth of the Lord (Mt. 1:18–25), and two majestic canons by Saints John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maiuma are sung. “Christ is born, give ye glory,” the Church sings. “Christ cometh from the Heavens, meet ye Him! Christ is on earth, be ye exalted! Hymn the Lord, all the earth! And chant in gladness, ye people, for He is glorified!” These words set the tenor of the feast.

Late at night on January 7 the Nativity Liturgy begins. The triumphant festal antiphons herald Christ’s eternal Begetting of the Father. In place of the Trisagion the baptismal hymn is sung: “As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.” This hymn reminds us of the ancient

tradition of baptising catechumens on the days of Nativity and Theophany. We hear the words concerning our adoption to the Father through the incarnate Son (Gal. 4:4–7) and the Gospel account of the adoration of the magi (Mt. 2:1–12). After communing at the Liturgy the jubilant Christians cease their fasting and, singing hymns in honor of the Newborn, greet each other with the day of God's reconciliation with men.

**January 7–17** we celebrate *Christmastide*. During this time we do not commemorate the dead, and we rejoice in the Savior Who has come to us from the Heavens. Incidentally, the Church categorically prohibits the various forms of fortunetelling and divination that certain people practice. This is a grave sin against God Himself, for which He punishes severely.

The feast of Christ's Nativity lasts until **January 13**.

**January 14** is the *Circumcision of the Lord* and the commemoration of *St. Basil the Great*—a great feast, which prior to the Revolution was celebrated as the civil New Year.

**The Sunday before Theophany** (the *Sunday before the Enlightenment*) has its own reading, recounting the preaching of John the Forerunner (2 Tim. 4:5–8, Mk. 1:1–8).

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**January 15–18** we celebrate the forefeast of Theophany. At compline, as before Nativity, canons modeled after Passion Week are read, for our baptism enables us to become participants in the death of the Lord. At matins the stichera of St. Theophan are sung, expounding the significance of Theophany.

On **January 18**, *Theophany Eve*, the royal hours are served, preparing us for the feast of Theophany. (First hour: Acts 13:25–32, Mt. 3:1–11. Third hour: Acts 19:1–8, Mk. 1:1–8. Sixth hour: Rom. 6:3–11, Mk. 1:9–15. Ninth hour: Tit. 2:11–14, Mt. 3:13–17). The day itself is marked by a strict fast “until the water,” i.e., until partaking of the newly-sanctified water of Theophany, after which we eat only fasting food.

In the afternoon the vespers of Theophany is served in conjunction with the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. Thirteen ancient prophecies and prefigurations of Theophany are read at this service (Gen. 1:1–13; Ex. 14:15–18, 21–23, 27–29; Ex. 15:22, 16:1; Josh. 3:7–8, 15–17; 2 Kings 2:6–14; 2 Kings 5:9–14; Is. 1:16–20; Gen. 32:1–10; Ex. 2:5–10; Judg. 6:36–40; 1 Kings 18:30–39; 2 Kings 2:19–22; Is. 49:8–15). The New Testament readings (1 Cor. 10:1–4, Lk. 3:1–18) concern the preaching of John the Baptist.

At the end of the Liturgy the priest exits the altar with an adorned cross, and all process to the water sources (or, if there be none, to vessels of water), singing a number of beautiful stichera. Three passages are read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, heralding the bestowal of the living water of the Holy Spirit (Is. 35:1–10; 55:1–13; and 12:3–6) followed by New Testament accounts of the Baptism of Christ (1 Cor. 10:1–4, Mk. 1:9–11). After an ectenia the



majestic prayer of the blessing of the water is read, in which the power of the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the water. After this the cross is immersed into the water source to the singing of the troparion of Theophany. The faithful and all buildings—the church, houses, and apartments—are sprinkled with the sanctified water, that all might be filled with the supernatural radiance of the Divinity. After the blessing of the water, as before Nativity, the priest sings the troparion and kontakion of the feast before a lighted candle (a symbol of John the Baptist).

*Theophany water* possesses many wondrous properties. It does not grow bacteria over the years. (Atheists have attempted to explain away this fact by the supposed introduction of silver ions into the water. The absurdity of this explanation is obvious, as silver crosses are extremely rare, and the blessing of rivers and other water sources renders this version completely impossible.) Partaking of the water heals many illnesses, drives out demons, and is an aid in managing anger, fornication, and other passions. It is used for blessing every kind of object. Christians barred from Communion drink it as an aid in their struggles with the passions.

Any Orthodox Christian may drink holy water when there is a need—in the morning before eating, or when beset by despondency and depression, or when aspiring to master the virtues. Only a person who has sins of which he has not repented may not partake of this holy water. Likewise, it may not be used for magic and sorcery, as certain magicians and psychics recommend.

On the evening of **January 18** the solemn All-night Vigil begins, consisting, as on the day of the Nativity, of great compline and matins. At matins the Gospel concerning the Lord's Baptism is read (Mk. 1:9–11), and two canons are sung, compiled by St. John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maiuma, the authors of the service of the Nativity.

The solemn Liturgy of Theophany is served on **January 19** (in some churches it is served at night). The festal antiphons are sung, and an epistle reading concerning the manifestation of God's grace in the sacrament of baptism (Tit. 2:11–14) and the Gospel account of the Baptism of Christ (Mt. 3:13–17) are read. At the end of the Liturgy the rite of the blessing of water is again performed. The similarity of the services of Nativity and Theophany is no coincidence. Prior to the 4th century in many churches these events were celebrated on the same day: January 19.

The second day of Theophany is dedicated to St. John the Forerunner. The feast itself lasts until January 27. Particular emphasis is placed on the Saturday and Sunday after Theophany.

**February 7** is the commemoration of *St. Gregory the Theologian*.

**February 12** is the joint commemoration of the three teachers of the Ecumenical Church: *Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom*.



**February 15** is one of the twelve great feasts: the *Meeting of the Lord*. At the All-night Vigil we hear the prophecy concerning the eternal glory of Christ and the Law of God (1st paremia: Ex. 12:51, 13: 1–3, 10–12, 14–16; Lev. 12:1–4, 6, 8; Num. 8:15–17. 2nd paremia: Is. 6:1–12. 3rd paremia: Is. 19:1, 3–5, 12, 16, 19–21). The ancient Law and Eternal Truth are met in the temple of Jerusalem, for Christ is both the Lawgiver and the Savior of all. This is the primary theme of the service to the feast. The secondary theme of the service is the glorification of the Mother of God. At matins and at Liturgy the account of the Lord's meeting with Symeon on the 40th day after the Nativity is read (Lk. 2:22–40; at matins the reading is abbreviated).

Before the Liturgy a solemn procession is appointed, and the candles of the Meeting are blessed, receiving special grace from the Lord. The epistle reading is dedicated to the subject of Christ as eternal High Priest, Whose ministry rescinded the Old Testament.

On **April 7** another of the twelve great feasts is observed: the *Annunciation of the Theotokos*, the day when God became Man. This feast is celebrated in the period between Thursday of the third week of Great Lent and Wednesday of Bright Week (after Pascha); hence, this service may take several forms. Ordinarily on the eve, April 6, at vespers the paremias to the Theotokos are read, and the stichera so beloved by the Orthodox are sung: "**Revealing the preeternal council.**"

As for Nativity, the All-night Vigil consists of great compline and matins. At the polyeleos we sing the wondrous megalynarion to the Mother of God: "**With the voice of the archangel we cry out to thee, O pure one: Rejoice, O thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee.**" The canon of the feast, written in the form of a dialogue between the Theotokos and the archangel Gabriel, moves one to admiration. The Order of Services calls for a procession before the Liturgy begins.

The festal Liturgy itself usually begins with vespers, at which the paremias concerning Christ's appearance are read (Ex. 3:1–8, Prov. 8:22–30). The Liturgy for the Annunciation is always a complete Liturgy (ordinarily that of St. John Chrysostom), even if the feast falls on Great Friday. Read at this Liturgy are the apostle's words concerning the Divine Incarnation's significance for our freedom from the power of the devil (Heb. 2:11–18) and the Gospel account of the Annunciation (Lk. 1:24–38). On the day of the feast the Church relaxes the fast, and unless Annunciation falls on Passion Week eating fish is permitted.

On **July 7** the great feast of the *Nativity of John the Baptist* is observed, and on **July 12**—the *Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul*. This great feast is preceded by a fast, which begins one week after the Day of the Holy Trinity (Pentecost), and is established in imitation of the holy apostles, who fasted before preaching the Word of God (Acts 13:3). This fast is not a strict fast, and

like the Nativity Fast fish may be eaten (according to the Typicon on Saturdays, Sundays, and feasts, but in practice on all days except for Wednesday and Friday).

On **August 14** the Holy Cross is brought out for veneration in the churches and honey is blessed. This feast is called the *Procession* (“carrying-out”) of the *Precious Tree of the Live-giving Cross of the Lord*.

On **August 19** the Church observes the *Transfiguration of the Lord*, one of the twelve great feasts. On this day we recall the glory that awaits the saved after the Day of Judgment, for Christ manifested it on Tabor.

At the All-night Vigil paremias concerning the glory of God (1st paremia: Ex. 24:12–18; 2nd paremia: Ex. 33:11–23, 34:4–6, 8; 3rd paremia: 1 Kings 19:3–9, 11–13, 15–16) and the account of Christ’s Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28–36) are read. The canon speaks of the glorification of our human nature in Christ and the eternal glory that awaits us.

At the Liturgy the festal antiphons are sung (the readings are 2 Pet. 1:10–19 and Mt. 17:1–9), and following the Liturgy grapes and fruits are blessed as God commanded back in the Old Testament: *The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God* (Ex. 23:19). Fulfilling this command, the Church has appointed that the first-fruits of grapes be brought on the day of Transfiguration, and prohibits eating them before they have been blessed. In central Russia apples ripen at this time, and so they too are blessed on this day. In general fruits that are ripe by this time should always be brought to the church on Transfiguration to be blessed. The linking of the solemn blessing of fruits with Transfiguration is no coincidence, for it prefigures the abundance of life in the rejuvenated universe where the righteous will live.

Transfiguration has a one-day forefeast and an afterfeast lasting five days. In the evening on the day of the feast, great vespers is served with a special festal great prokeimenon.

On **August 28** the great feast of the *Dormition of the Theotokos*, one of the twelve, is celebrated. This festival, colloquially called the “Pascha of the Theotokos,” is preceded by a strict two-week fast (fish may be eaten only on Transfiguration), preparing us for parting with the Mother of God. At the festal vigil we hymn the Most-pure One and ask her in whom death has already been overcome not to forget us, her children. A moving photogogicon imparts to us the attitude of the Most-pure One before her death: “**O ye apostles gathered here from all the ends of the earth, bury my body in the garden of Gethsemane. And do Thou, O my Son and my God, receive my spirit.**” In many churches the shroud of the Theotokos is brought out for veneration, and on the third day (or the day of the feast itself) the “rite of burial of the Shroud” is served, modeled after the service of Great Saturday. Dormition has a one-day forefeast and an afterfeast lasting nine days.

**September 11** is the great feast of the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*. This day is one of sorrowful festivity, hence the Church has made it a day of strict fasting, lest we imitate the revelry of Herod, who ordered the execution of this greatest among those born of women, as the Lord Himself said. Incidentally, all claims that round foods should not be eaten on the Beheading of John the Forerunner are pure superstition, unbefitting a Christian.

Such is the yearly cycle of services, through which time is no longer synonymous with death, but becomes a place for encountering the Eternal God.

## The Paschal Cycle

The greatest feast for Orthodox Christians is Holy Pascha, the day of Christ's Resurrection, which takes us beyond the bounds of the fallen universe and sparkles with the lustrous radiance of the Sun of love.

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The day of Pascha is a moveable feast. The date of this feast is calculated as follows: Pascha falls between March 22 and April 25, and is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox, invariably after the Jewish Passover. Since the sun and the moon move across the vault of heaven at different speeds (the solar cycle lasts 28 years, while the lunar cycle lasts 19), the Paschal cycle repeats itself entirely only once every 532 years. This period is known as the *Great Indiction*.

In order to better prepare us for this day and highlight this radiance the Church has established the seven-week period of *Great Lent* to precede it, ending on the night of the feast.

The Paschal cycle begins with three Sundays that prepare us for Great Lent. From this point on the *Triodion* is used—a liturgical book containing the sacred texts of the Paschal cycle. There is the *Lenten Triodion*, which describes the services of Great Lent through Pascha, and the *Pentecostarion*, lasting from Pascha until All Saints Day. The word *Triodion* means “book of three-canticle canons,” because it primarily contains canons consisting of three odes.

Preparation for Great Lent begins with the *Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee* (the third Sunday before the beginning of Lent). The very name implies the chief theme of the day: the meaning of the Gospel parable of the publican and the Pharisee (Lk. 18:9–14). Knowing that the passion of pride is capable of destroying and killing every good deed, the Church invites us to avoid this evil and imitate the repentance of the publican. To this end at the All-night Vigil after the reading of the Gospel the choir begins to sing the moving words of this penitential hymn:

“The doors of repentance do Thou open unto me, O Giver of life, for my spirit waketh at dawn toward Thy holy temple, bearing a temple of the body

all defiled. But in Thy compassion, cleanse it by the loving-kindness of Thy mercy.

“Guide me in the paths of salvation, O Theotokos, for I have defiled my soul with shameful sins, and have wasted all my life in slothfulness, but by thine intercessions deliver me from all uncleanness.

“When I think of the multitude of evil things I have done, I, a wretched one, I tremble at the fearful day of judgment; but trusting in the mercy of Thy loving-kindness, like David do I cry unto Thee: Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.”

These prayers are sung in the churches until the fifth Sunday of Great Lent.

In order to deliver us from the pride of the Pharisee, the Church has made the week of the publican and the Pharisee *fast-free*; i.e., fasting is suspended on Wednesday and Friday.

The second preparatory Sunday before Great Lent is called the *Sunday of the Prodigal Son*, since we commemorate the Lord’s parable of the same name (Lk. 15:11–32). Thus the Church teaches us, despite the multitude of our sins, to continue to hope in the mercy of the Heavenly Father.

On this Sunday, as on the two following, Psalm 136 is sung: “*By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, and we wept when we remembered Sion.*” These words of the Hebrews as they sat in the dread captivity of Babylon remind us that we too are outside our Heavenly Fatherland. The Psalmist commands us to have no concourse with demons, who hold us in spiritual slavery, but to look to the Lord for salvation. Even their infants (i.e., evil thoughts) must be immediately killed, dashing them against the rock of the name of Christ.

The week following is called *meatfare week* (when meat is permitted). This is the last week before Pascha when meat may be eaten.

On Saturday of this week we observe *All Souls Saturday*, when Christians commemorate their departed relatives and all departed Orthodox. The time chosen for this commemoration is no coincidence: before recalling the Last Judgment we ask God to grant the resurrection of the righteous to all the departed.

*Meatfare Sunday* reminds us of the Last Judgment that awaits us all (the Gospel read is Mt. 25:31–46). The coming fast is to help us prepare for that great day. On this day we eat meat for the last time.

Then begins the fast-free *Cheesefare Week, or Maslenitsa* (when dairy products are permitted). During this week we eat sour cream, milk, eggs, and fish, but abstain from meat. The divine services during this week are already permeated with lenten motifs. On Wednesday and Friday the Liturgy is omitted, and the service is conducted according to the lenten order. On Saturday the Church commemorates the *Venerable Fathers who have Shown*

*Forth in Fasting.* As a general before the battle inspires his troops with the example of heroes of yore, so the Church shows us the model of the exalted sanctity of the righteous, who overcame the powers of evil with the aid of prayer and fasting.

The last Sunday before Lent is called *Forgiveness Sunday*. On this day we commemorate Adam's fall into sin and his banishment from Paradise. The first man sinned in violating the first commandment to fast, and introduced death into the world. Conversely, we who desire to achieve Eternal Life must labor in fasting so as to restore Paradise again.

That our labor might not be in vain, the Church offers us Christ's rules for fasting (Mt. 6:14–21), of which the first condition is complete forgiveness of all offences. For this purpose in all churches the moving *rite of forgiveness* is served that evening in conjunction with a beautiful vespers service. After the entrance with the censer and the great prokeimenon the melodies change, and we embark upon the season of the fast. At the end of the service we make prostrations with the words of the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian:

“O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, despondency, ambition, and idle talking give me not.

“But rather a spirit of chastity, humble-mindedness, patience, and love bestow upon me Thy servant.

“Yea, O Lord King, grant me to see my own failings and not condemn my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.”

After vespers the prayers of blessing for those about to begin the fast are read. Then, to the singing of penitential hymns, before the icons of Christ and the Theotokos we ask forgiveness of one another. In conclusion, as a glimmer of the approaching feast, in many churches the stichera of Pascha are sung. At home all partake of non-lenten foods for the last time, and on Monday Great Lent begins.

Great Lent consists of two parts: the holy Quadragesima (“forty-day fast”), established in imitation of the fast of the Savior (Mt. 4:2), and Passion Week. The strictest days are the first and last weeks of the fast. Throughout this entire time we abstain from meat, dairy, and eggs. Fish may be eaten only on Annunciation (April 7 new style) and Palm Sunday. On Saturdays and Sundays vegetable oil, wine, and other seafood (calamari, shrimp, etc.) are permitted. One should also withdraw from entertainments and spectacles and refrain from every kind of excess.

The season of the fast is a time of compassion, prayer, repentance, and every kind of good work. It is particularly important to attentively read Holy Scripture during Lent. At this time the Church reads through several books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Proverbs, Job, the Psalter, and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel.

During the first four days of the fast all Christians gather in the churches in the evening, to pray at the *Great Canon of Repentance of Saint Andrew of Crete*.

On Wednesday and Friday throughout the fast the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts is served—a special vespers at which the faithful commune of the Body and Blood prepared at a full Liturgy. On other weekdays of the Quadragesima the Liturgy is not appointed, except on great feasts.

On the first Friday at the end of the Liturgy a *moleben* (a brief service of supplication) is served in remembrance of a miracle performed by the martyr Theodore of Tyro, who saved the Christians from the mockery of the emperor Julian the Apostate. At this service *koliva* (sweet boiled wheat) is blessed.

The first Sunday of Great Lent is called the *Sunday of Orthodoxy*. On this day we commemorate the victory of Orthodoxy over the heresy of iconoclasm and over all other heresies. After the Liturgy a solemn moleben is served with prayers for the conversion of those who have gone astray and the uprooting of all heresies. At the end of the moleben the deacon pronounces the anathema (excommunication from the Church) against all those who do not preserve the Orthodox faith, and eternal memory to the champions of Orthodoxy.

The second Sunday of Lent is dedicated to *Saint Gregory Palamas* (1360), defender of the teaching regarding the acquisition of the uncreated Divine Light. Thus the Church reminds us of the goal of our spiritual life, the achievement of which is the reason for the fast.

The third Sunday of Lent is the *Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross*. At the All-night Vigil the Holy Cross is brought out for veneration, so that by honoring the instrument of Christ's Passions the burden of the fast might be made sweet for us. The rite of veneration of the Cross is likewise performed on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of this week. At the Liturgy instead of the Trisagion we sing the hymn, "Before Thy cross we bow down in worship, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify."

The fourth Sunday is the commemoration of *Saint John of the Ladder* (649), who left us a highly detailed description of how one may ascend from earth to heaven along the ladder of the virtues. The Service Order calls for his book, *The Ladder*, to be read in its entirety during Great Lent.

On Thursday of the fifth week the *Station of Saint Mary of Egypt* is observed. The Great Canon of Repentance of Saint Andrew of Crete and the life of Mary of Egypt, a former harlot who achieved the heights of sanctity through repentance, are read in their entirety.

Saturday of the fifth week is called the *Saturday of the Akathist*, because at a solemn matins the great akathist to the Theotokos is read and all the



miracles that have been performed by the prayers of the Most-pure One are recalled.

The fifth Sunday is dedicated to *Saint Mary of Egypt* in order that we might not despair of our salvation, despite our innumerable evil deeds.

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Friday of the sixth week concludes the holy Quadragesima. The sixth Saturday is called *Lazarus Saturday*, because on that day we commemorate the miracle of the resurrection of the righteous Lazarus (Jn. 11:1–45). This is the only Saturday service of its kind, as it imitates the Sunday service, for the resurrection of Lazarus was a harbinger of the general resurrection. At matins the Sunday troparia are sung: “*The assembly of the angels was amazed.*” At the Liturgy instead of the Trisagion the baptismal hymn is sung: “*As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia.*” On Lazarus Saturday the Typicon blesses the eating of caviar.

On the last Sunday before Pascha the Church celebrates one of the twelve great feasts: *The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem*. Multitudes of the Orthodox fill the churches, carrying the symbols of Christ’s victory over death: palm branches, for which pussy willows are substituted in Russia (which, incidentally, is in keeping with biblical tradition—cf. Lev. 23:40) and lighted candles. Hence the other name for this feast—*Palm Sunday*.

At the festive All-night Vigil prophecies are read which from time immemorial foresaw the Messiah’s glorious appearance to Israel, coming to Jerusalem to deliver His people from the abyss of Hades (Gen. 49:1–2, 8–12; Zeph. 3:14–19; Zech. 9:9–15). After reading the Gospel account of this event (Mt. 21:1–11, 15–17), during the reading of the 50th psalm the priest censes the flowering branches and reads a prayer of blessing over them. Then the palms or pussy willows are sprinkled with holy water.

At the festive Liturgy festal antiphons are sung and biblical passages are read concerning Christ’s entry into the holy city and how to acquire the peace of God, whose harbinger is the Lord Jesus (Phil. 4:4–9, Jn. 12:1–18). On this day the Orthodox partake of fish.



By evening, however, the service turns our attention from the bright celebration of Palm Sunday to the contemplation of the saving sufferings of Christ. Beginning on Sunday evening and until Great Wednesday the dismissal prayer is as follows: “May the Lord who came to His voluntary passion for our salvation, Christ our true God, through the intercessions of the Theotokos and of all the saints, have mercy on us and save us.”

## Passion Week

The last week before Pascha is called *Passion Week*, for at this time the Church recalls the saving sufferings of Christ.<sup>56</sup> Each day of this week is called “great,” owing to the greatness of God’s works that were performed in them.

During the first three days of Passion Week the services are lenten in form. At matins a moving troparion is sung: “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching, but unworthy is he whom He shall find in slothfulness. Beware, therefore, O my soul, and be not overcome by sleep; lest thou be given over to death, and shut out from the kingdom. But return to soberness and cry aloud: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God; through the Theotokos, have mercy on us.”

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At matins and the Liturgy the Gospel accounts are read describing the events in sacred history that occurred during those days. The usual canon is replaced with three-canticle canons. After these the priest in the altar or a special cantor in the center of the church sings the photogogicon: “I see Thy bridal chamber adorned, O my Savior, and I have no wedding garment that I may enter there. Make the robe of my soul to shine, O Giver of Light, and save me.”

At the hours on these days the Gospel is read in its entirety, reminding us of the Testament that the Savior gave us, and the account of the manifestation of God sitting upon the throne of the cherubim is read (Ezek. 1–2). This account describes the inner glory of the suffering Christ that He had with the Father before time began, and how the evangelists in imitation of the cherubim (for the cherubim symbolize these apostles) bear upon themselves the one Divine Revelation.

At the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts we read the book of Exodus, which describes the events leading up to the Passover of old, and the book of Job, for his innocent sufferings prefigured the Lord’s Sacrifice.

*Great Monday* is dedicated to the remembrance of Joseph the Fair, son of the Hebrew forefather Jacob. Out of envy he was sold by his brothers into Egypt, where God made him a ruler and through him saved the Israelites

<sup>56</sup> The word *passion* comes from the Latin word meaning “to suffer”—*Trans*.

from famine. Joseph is a prefiguration of the suffering Christ, betrayed by His disciple and manifesting His glory through the Resurrection.

*Great Tuesday* reminds us of the parable of the nine virgins (Mt. 25) and of Judgment Day.

*Great Wednesday* is dedicated to the remembrance of Judas' betrayal and the loving act of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with myrrh. Before Liturgy on that day, as before the beginning of the fast, the rite of forgiveness is performed, at the end of which prostrations are made in the temple for the last time until Pentecost. From this day on the Psalter is no longer read in the churches.

*Great Thursday* arrives, the day of the Mystical Supper, when Christ established the Sacrament of His Body and Blood. Matins is served the evening of the day before (the Typicon calls for it to be served late at night), at which after the singing of the troparion of the day, recalling Judas' betrayal, the Gospel is read concerning the events of this holy day, and a full canon is sung. At the first hour the prophecy of Jeremiah is read concerning the Savior's sufferings (Jer. 20).

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In the afternoon the most important Liturgy of the entire church year is served. In commemoration of the Mystical Supper it is combined with vespers. After an entry with the Gospel three paremias are read. The first describes God's appearance on Sinai, when the Old Testament was established (Ex. 19:10–19)—a particularly fitting reading for the day the New Testament was established. The second is taken from the book of Job (Job 38:1–28, 40:1–5), where in answer to that righteous man's questions the Lord reveals to him the mystery of Christ's victory over death. Finally, the third directly prophesies the torments that the Lord endured for the sake of our salvation (Is. 50:4–10). After this a passage from the epistles is read concerning worthy communion of the Holy Mysteries (1 Cor. 11:23–32), followed by a composite Gospel account of the events of Great Thursday. In place of the Cherubic Hymn and during communion the following hymn is sung: "Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, receive me today as a communicant; for I will not speak of the Mystery to Thine enemies; nor will I give Thee a kiss, as did Judas, but like the thief do I confess Thee: Remember me, O Lord, in Thy kingdom." On this day all Christians commune of the Life-creating Mysteries of the Lord. In cathedrals the rite of the washing of the feet is performed, and myrrh is consecrated for the sacrament of chrismation.

In the evening in the churches the service of the Holy Passion of Christ is performed.

At matins of Great Friday twelve Gospel passages are read that describe the sufferings of the Lord (Jn. 13:31–18:1, Jn. 18:1–28, Mt. 26:57–75, Jn. 16:28–19:16, Mt. 27:3–32, Mk. 15:16–32, Mt. 27:33–54, Lk. 23:32–55, Jn. 19:25–37, Mk. 15:43–47, Jn. 19:38–42, Mt. 27:62–68). The ancient antiphons, which date back to the

worship of the Church of Jerusalem in the 4th century, describe the meaning of Christ's sufferings for our salvation. Before the Cross the moving photogicon is sung: "The good thief this very day hast Thou vouchsafed paradise, O Lord. By the wood of the cross do thou enlighten me also and save me." Traditionally Christians take home with them the fire of the candles that were lit during the reading of the holy Gospels, and with this flame they mark a cross on the lintels of the doorways.

In the morning of Passion Friday the Liturgy is not served, since on this day Christ offered His own Self in sacrifice on the Cross of Golgotha. Instead the most important hours of the church year are served, called *the royal hours*, since formerly the emperor was always present for them. At these hours selected psalms are read foretelling the Crucifixion, as well as prophecies concerning the Lord's death, passages from the apostolic epistles showing the meaning of the redemptive Sacrifice, and the Gospel account of the events of the Passion at the very time when they occurred.

According to the ancient canons of the church, the fast on Great Friday is the strictest of the church year: healthy adults must eat nothing until the end of the Liturgy on Great Saturday. This is based on the words of the Savior (Mk. 2:20).

In the afternoon, at the time when the Lord died, in all churches *great vespers* is served. Stichera are sung mourning the death of Christ, followed by an entry with the Gospel. Then the prokeimenon is intoned from Psalm 21 regarding the Savior's godforsakenness, and three paremias are read heralding the death and the glory of Christ (Ex. 33:11–33, Job 42:12–17, Is. 52:13–54). After the paremias Christ's descent into hades is proclaimed (Ps. 87:7, 2) and the epistle passage concerning the glory of the Cross is read (1 Cor. 1:18–2:2). The peak of the vespers is a composite account of the death of Christ compiled from the four Gospels. After the singing of the evening hymn "Vouchsafe, O Lord," however, the next day begins, and through the sorrow of the Passion the radiance of the victory over death can now be glimpsed. Hades cannot hold the Divine soul of the Savior, as the stichera at the aposticha sing. But on earth the disciples are filled with sorrow, and we join Joseph of Arimathea in taking the Lord's body down from the Cross. During the singing of the stichera, "When Joseph with Nicodemus took Thee down from the tree, who art clothed with light as with a garment," the rector in full vesture exits the altar carrying the *Shroud* (an icon of the Lord in death) which had previously lain on the holy table. It is placed in the center of the church, and the Christians venerate it, lamenting together with the Mother of God over her dead Son.

*Great Friday* arrives, when the Lord, reposing in the grave in the flesh, destroyed the gates of hades and led its captives forth to freedom. According to the Typicon matins for this day is served late at night, though in practice

it is served on Friday evening. Christians pray with lighted candles over the body of the Lord Who has died, chanting the refrains to Psalm 118. This custom dates back to Christ Himself, Who when going from the Mystical Supper to His sufferings sang psalms 115–118. After the singing of this psalm the Church then begins to sing the resurrectional hymns, “**The assembly of the angels was amazed.**” The brilliance of Pascha is already shining through the darkness of the grave. A moving canon is sung glorifying the great rest of Christ and heralding the downfall of hades. After the great doxology, to the singing of the Trisagion the priest carries the Shroud around the church, remembering the burial of Christ. Then the news of the General Resurrection is proclaimed—the prophecy of Ezekiel concerning the field of bones resurrected by the power of God (Ezek. 37:1–14). The epistle reading prepares us for the proper celebration of Pascha (1 Cor. 5:6–7, Gal. 3:13–14), and the “alleluia” with the paschal verses (Ps. 67) lead us to the very brink of the joy of the Resurrection. The Gospel describes the vain attempt of the Jews to prevent the Resurrection, which proved the best witness to the authenticity of the miracle (Mt. 28:11–14).

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*The Liturgy of Great Saturday* (of Saint Basil the Great) is combined with vespers, and hence already pertains to Pascha. The Typicon requires that it be served at sunset, so as to begin the paschal celebration immediately upon its completion. At this service all the readings take place before the Shroud. Stichera are sung concerning the fall of the power of death and the triumph of the risen Savior. After the entry with the Gospel, fifteen Old Testament prophecies are read concerning the upheaval of the world and our liberation (Gen. 1:1–13; Is. 60:1–16; Ex. 12:1–11; Jonah; Josh. 5:10–15; Ex. 13:20–15, 19; Zeph. 3:8–15; 1 Kings 17:8–23; Is. 61:1–62, 5; Gen. 21:1–18; Is. 61:1–9; 2 Kings 4:8–37; Is. 63:11–64, 5; Jer. 31:31–34; Dan. 3:1–88). After the seventh paremia the reader and the people sing the joyous hymn of the Hebrews’ exodus from Egypt, as a prefiguration of our salvation through baptism. After the description of the miracle of the three youths’ deliverance from the flame the Church sings their song, summoning all creation to praise the Creator.

In the ancient Church at this time the catechumens would be baptized; hence, immediately after the paremias the hymn “**As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, alleluia**” is sung, and a passage from the epistles is read (Rom. 6:3–11), describing baptism as co-burial and co-resurrection with Christ. After the epistle reading instead of “Alleluia” Psalm 81 is chanted, during which all the clergy divest of their dark robes and vest in bright vestments resembling the garments of the angels, to welcome the Risen One. The deacon, like the angel, comes out of the altar and for the first time, at the Lord’s tomb, proclaims to all His Resurrection (Mt. 28). Liturgy is then served following the usual order, but instead of the Cherubic Hymn we sing the hymn, “**Let all mortal flesh keep silence, and with fear and trembling stand,**” calling us to spiritual silence before the face of Christ Who died and has risen,

and Who bestows upon us His Body and Blood. At the end of the Liturgy bread and wine are blessed to strengthen the Christians for the paschal vigil.

Ordinarily in the morning the paschal meal is blessed. People bring *kulich* (a paschal sweet bread), cheese pascha, and dyed eggs—a symbol of life issuing forth from the bonds of death—to the church to be blessed. One may also bring meat to be blessed, but the canons prohibit bringing it into the church.

## THE PASCHA OF CHRIST

The feast of *Pascha* (from the Hebrew word *pesah*, “to pass over”—the destroying angel described in the Old Testament “passed over” the houses marked with lamb’s blood) is the greatest of all the feasts of the church year, the day when God created the world, delivered the Hebrews from slavery, became incarnate of the Mother of God, and, most importantly, rose from the dead, granting us the victory over death. In preparation for this day all the churches are adorned with flowers and candles, the smoke of incense proclaims to us Paradise Restored, and over the royal doors glows the news of the Resurrection.

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On Saturday evening in the churches the book of the Acts of the Apostles is read in its entirety, recounting the fruits of the Resurrection. At this time the Orthodox assemble in the church. When the reading ends the *paschal midnight office* is served. The canon of Great Saturday is sung, at the end of which the Shroud is carried back into the altar, symbolizing the Resurrection of Christ, as yet invisible to all. The Shroud remains on the holy table until Ascension, reminding us of how Christ abode with the disciples for forty days after the Resurrection.

Precisely at midnight a procession begins. The priests, vested in bright garments, come out of the altar, carrying a cross with a three-branched candle holder, the icon of the Resurrection, and the Gospel. In imitation of the myrrh-bearing women, all the Christians circle the church singing the sticheron, “Thy resurrection, O Christ Savior, the angels hymn in the heavens; vouchsafe also us on earth with pure hearts to glorify Thee.”

The procession is accompanied by the festive ringing of the bells. The priests stop before the closed west doors of the church, and the rector, tracing the sign of the cross thrice with the censer, glorifies the Holy Trinity. This exclamation begins the *paschal matins*. Three times the priests sing the troparion of Pascha: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!”

The people then take up the hymn, and sing it many times with the verses of Psalms 67 and 117. Finally, to the singing of the troparion the rector blesses the church doors with the cross, as though opening them with it,

symbolizing that heaven was opened by the Cross. After the ectenia of peace the festive paschal canon begins, composed by St. John of Damascus, in which the jubilant Church glorifies her Redeemer. Each ode is accompanied by a censuring of the church, with the priest repeatedly changing the color of his vestments, symbolizing the rainbow—the sign of God’s mercy. After each ode the small ectenia is intoned, and the Holy Trinity Who has saved us is glorified. At the end of the canon this exapostilarion is sung: “**Having fallen asleep in the flesh, as a mortal, O King and Lord, on the third day Thou didst rise again, raising up Adam from corruption and abolishing death. O Pascha of incorruption, salvation of the world!**”

The triumphant oratorio of the psalms of praise is accompanied by the resurrectional stichera, which give way to the stichera of Pascha, calling us to forgive all on the day of the Resurrection. All the Christians greet each other with the kiss of love and the joyful words, “Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!” Then the Catechetical Homily of John Chrysostom is delivered.

On Pascha and throughout the following week (called *Bright Week*) the Psalter is not chanted, and special paschal hours are served (which also take the place of the morning and evening prayers).

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The festal Liturgy is like a celestial feast. Instead of the Trisagion the baptismal hymn is sung, and the reading of the book of Acts begins, recounting the appearance of the Risen One (Acts 1:1–8). As the heart of the feast, the Gospel account of the extraterrestrial existence of the Holy Trinity is read in various languages (Jn. 1:1–17). All Christians commune on the night of Pascha. At the end of the Liturgy in memory of Christ we bless the paschal bread (the *artos*), which possesses special curative powers.

On the evening of Pascha, when the Lord appeared to His disciples, a festive vespers is served. The Gospel reading concerning this appearance of Christ (Jn. 20:19–25) is read facing west—the only time out of the whole year.

Throughout Bright Week the services are served according to the paschal order. Only the melodies (or tones) change, as a prototype of the resurrectional services throughout the year.

On Friday water is blessed in the churches, in remembrance of the wonders of the Theotokos, manifested through the life-giving spring in Constantinople. On Saturday after a procession the *artos* is broken and distributed to the faithful.

The second Sunday after Pascha is dedicated to the remembrance of the Lord’s appearance to the apostle Thomas (Jn. 20:19–31). This day is also called *Antipascha* (i.e., “instead of Pascha”). The service for this day is like the divine services on great feasts.

The third Sunday is dedicated to the memory of the *myrrh-bearing women*, the first witnesses of Christ’s Resurrection.

The fourth Sunday reminds us of the healing of *the paralytic*.

The fifth: Christ’s talk with the *Samaritan woman*.

The sixth: the healing of *the blind man*.

These three accounts, which manifest Christ's power, are taken from the Gospel of John, read during the fifty days from Pascha until Pentecost. The midpoint of this period is celebrated as the independent feast of the *Mid-feast of Pentecost*, reminding us of the connection between the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

On Wednesday of the sixth week once again, for the final time, we return to the paschal service, for on this day the apodosis (or leave-taking) of the feast of Pascha is observed. On the next (fortieth) day the Church celebrates one of the twelve great feasts: the *Ascension of Christ*.

The seventh Sunday is dedicated to the celebration of the memory of the *Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council*, which defended the teaching of Christ's Divinity.

On the eve of the feast of Pentecost the Church remembers all Christians who have died, so that the Spirit of God might touch not only the living, but also those who have departed from hence.

## PENTECOST

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The great feast of Pentecost is dedicated to the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of life, into the world. The churches are adorned with greenery, especially birch branches, as a sign of the Eternal Life that came to us through the Spirit of God—a custom that has been observed since the time of the holy apostles.

This day is also called the *Day of the Holy Trinity*, for with the appearance of the Spirit we have gained access to the knowledge of the inner life of the Divinity.

At the All-night Vigil the ancient prophecies concerning the coming of the Heavenly Comforter are read (from the book of Joel), and the first bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the evening of Pascha is recalled. For the first time since Pascha the moving hymn to the Holy Spirit, "*O Heavenly King*," is sung in the churches.

At the Liturgy for the feast the account of the sacred event itself is read (Acts 2), along with Christ the Savior's foretelling of this (Jn. 7).

Then in the churches a festive vespers service begins, dedicated to the Holy Spirit. The Great Prokeimenon concerning the wonderworking might of the Creator is intoned: "*What God is as great as our God? Thou art God Who alone worketh wonders*." Immediately thereafter, for the first time since Great Friday, we kneel, and the priest reads seven prayers<sup>57</sup> invoking the Holy Spirit.

<sup>57</sup> *Translator's note:* While there may appear to be only three prayers, these are actually seven different prayers, which are read in three sets.



In them we ask God to forgive us our sins, to purify the offences of those who have died, even those in hades, and to strengthen us in Divine power.

On the next day the Church keeps a festival in honor of the Spirit Himself Who enlivens us. The whole week following the feast (*Trinity Week*) is fast-free, with no fasting on Wednesday and Friday.

The Sunday after the Day of the Holy Trinity is the *Sunday of All Saints*. Thus the Church shows that the work of the Holy Spirit has not been without fruit. All the saints of the past, present, and future are united around Christ. Thus the Church offers its fruits to God.

The day after the Sunday of All Saints marks the beginning of the *Saints Peter and Paul Fast*, dedicated to the remembrance of the preaching of the apostles. This lasts until the Day of the Holy Apostles on June 29/July 12.

The second Sunday after Pentecost is dedicated to all the saints who have shown forth in the land of Russia.

## INDIVIDUAL PRAYER SERVICES (SERVICES OF NEED)

**I**n addition to the common services and sacraments, the Church gives aid to her faithful children in their individual needs. These are various *molebens* containing petitions for deliverance from various afflictions, the bestowal of health or healing of the sick, blessing on a journey by sea, land, or air, or for undertaking any good work, study, and the like, as well as thanksgiving for God's benefactions that we have received (miracles, healings, petitions fulfilled—all the things that fill the life of a Christian). The whole life of an Orthodox Christian is permeated with the Divine light, hence there are many rites of blessing. Through the priests the Creator sanctifies houses, undertakings, chariots, seeds for planting, fruits of the new harvest, and much more. Thus the whole world is encompassed in the Church's great work of sanctification.

A special place is given to *molebens* during times of trouble, when the Church assembles to pray the God of Justice to have mercy upon His creation. These are *molebens* in times of drought, hurricane, storm, rain, epidemic, earthquake, and many other troubles. Church History has recorded thousands of miracles worked by God in response to these sighs of entreaty. Frequently in times of drought, when the priest would go out to the field to serve a *moleben* for rain, he would take an umbrella with him, and it was a rare thing for the umbrella to go unused!

## THE BLESSING OF WATER

God's grace is bestowed most frequently through holy water, which is permeated with heavenly strength. The very rite of the blessing of water was foreordained in the Old Testament (Num. 19:11–22), and also in the New Testament, in the miracle at the pool of Bethesda, when an angel imbued the water with curative power (Jn. 5:2–4). The element of water itself was sanctified by the Lord at His Baptism in the river Jordan; hence, in the churches water is blessed in a particular way on the day of this feast. But there are other times when the Lord bestows sanctification upon the waters during a *water-blessing moleben*. The priest immerses the life-giving cross into the water three times with prayer, and the water receives curative power. All those present are then sprinkled with holy water, receiving heavenly gladness.

## HOW ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS PREPARE FOR DEATH

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For a Christian, death is the most important event of his life, for which he prepares from the moment of his baptism. Death is the transition of a person's soul from the material world to the spiritual universe, it concludes the freedom of choice, and it is the day when a person begins to be judged. As the word of the Lord says, according to Holy Tradition, "As I find you, so shall I judge you."

After death there is no repentance, and so Orthodox Christians develop the habit of preparing for this most important moment. Remembering that death may come unexpectedly—as the Russian proverb says, "A man's death is not over the hills, but over his shoulder"—we try always to prepare for death, even when there is nothing to suggest its approach. We must be particularly attentive, however, when we learn that we have a terminal illness (it is a grave sin for doctors and relatives to conceal this fact from a sick person). The dying person must not fall into despair, as the godless do, but must promptly begin to prepare for death. He leaves off all unnecessary affairs and sinful ties: the smoker quits tobacco, the fornicator breaks off his shameful union, the drunkard stops drinking, the debtor pays off his debts, the thief returns the stolen goods. We must remember whether there is anyone to whom we have not yet been reconciled, and be certain to ask that person for forgiveness, as the Lord said: *Agree [i.e., make peace] with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing* (Mt. 5:25–26).

Anyone who has been offended must also be reconciled to the dying person, so that God's anger does not come down upon him. There was one instance when two monks, friends who lived in the Kiev Caves Lavra, had quarreled. One of them, Hieromonk Titus, fell mortally ill and resolved to ask forgiveness of his former companion, Hierodeacon Evagrius, but the latter did not wish to forgive him. Then Evagrius was forcibly dragged to the bed of the dying man. Titus crawled off the bed and, falling down on his knees, begged forgiveness. But the proud deacon cried, "I will not forgive him either in this life or the next!" The next moment he fell down dead, and Titus rose from the floor healthy. All were amazed, and Titus related to them that he had seen a threatening angel standing beside him, promising to punish him for the offence he had committed against Evagrius. But when Titus asked forgiveness, and Evagrius would not forgive him, the angel pierced the hard-hearted monk with a fiery spear, and healed Titus with a touch.

One must endure the illnesses leading up to death with prayer and thanksgiving, remembering that suffering endured with patience cleanses a person of sins. During this time one must commune frequently, visit churches and holy places, and be more attentive to loved ones. In ancient Rus' it was customary at this time to receive the monastic tonsure. It is a time for constant reading of Holy Scripture and patristic literature.

When a dying person's condition no longer permits him to go to church, he should then pray at home. When thoughts of despondency and despair attack, one should read the Gospel and the Psalter. One should commune at home, as well. It is also greatly beneficial to receive the sacrament of unction, which bestows the gift of a painless end.

And so the day of one's end approaches. Usually a Christian's kith and kin gather around him to support him with prayer and comfort in his final hour. Most importantly, however, they invite his spiritual father or simply the nearest priest, who will administer the last rites to the dying one. First the person sincerely confesses all his sins committed throughout his life, and receives the Body and Blood of Christ. According to the church canons, a dying person communes even if he has taken food and has not read the rule. In the Trinity-Sergius Lavra there was an instance when a deacon died immediately after the Liturgy. Later he appeared to one of his friends, and in answer to the question of how he had evaded the ambush of the prince of darkness he replied, "I flew past them like lightning for the sake of the grace of Holy Communion."

A dying person may only commune when conscious, however. While a person is unconscious no sacraments may be administered except baptism (and then only on the condition that the person had intended to be baptized, but was unable). If he has not received unction during his illness he is given unction. After this the priest reads the "Canon at the Parting of the Soul from the Body." In it on behalf of the dying person he asks Christ and the Theotokos to help him to pass through the aerial realm where the devil reigns, and

to appear justified before the throne of God. After the canon the priest reads the prayer at the departure of the soul, with a petition that it be cleansed of all evil and depart in peace. If a person is dying in great agony, the priest serves the “Rite at the Parting of the Soul from the Body When a Person has Long Been Suffering.”

If there is no priest nearby, and a person is dying and is suffering attacks from the demons, his relatives must read the Gospel and sprinkle the dying person with holy water. Nevertheless, the most effective aid is rendered by Holy Communion, to administer which, according to the canons of the Church, the priest is even obligated to stop the service (except for the Eucharistic Canon). One must not be embarrassed to bother the priest at any time of day or night, if there is a chance the sick person may die. For if the relatives fail to minister to the dying person’s last needs they incur a grave sin.

The author knows of the following incident: a certain priest was asked to visit a dying woman, and when he came he saw a strange scene: the sick woman was lying, eyes wide with fright, attempting with her hands to ward off invisible beings that were attacking her from all sides. “I’m frightened! I’m frightened!” she cried, but no one could help her. The priest asked her whether she wished to commune. “Yes!” she replied. After this she lost the power of speech, and only gazed in horror at the dreadful tormenters standing about her. As soon as she had communed, however, a smile immediately appeared on her lips, her face grew calm, and a few minutes later she reposed in peace. Thus, under no circumstances should the last rites ever be put off. Any person who is dying must be asked whether he wishes to commune (or, if unbaptized, to be baptized), regardless of whether or not he was previously a believer. For as the moment of death approaches the spiritual eyes of many are opened, and they begin to see the reality they had previously rejected.

## COMMEMORATION OF THE DEPARTED

When a person is dying his immortal soul leaves the body and enters the world of the demons. If the person was faithful to God, his guardian angel defends him and helps him to go toward the heavens. If not, the demons immediately seize his hapless soul and drag it into the abyss of hades. Even as he ascends the evil spirits attempt at the last moment to take possession of the person, either seducing a soul unconfirmed in good with temptations, or else attempting to terrify it, citing unrepented sins. This is precisely why after death the Church prays intensively for those who have departed.

Some assert that if a person has died everything is already determined and it is pointless to pray. Orthodox Christians, however, who know that love

never fails (1 Cor. 13:8), pray for the departed, firm in the hope that their lot will be eased through the goodness of the Redeemer. In the words of the apostle, it was for this that Christ died and rose again—to reign over both the dead and the living (Rom. 14:9)—and hence He is able to free from darkness the souls of those who have not become frozen in evil.

The Church prays only for its members, however, born in baptism unto God. For her prayer is able to help only those who have died Orthodox Christians, hoping in the resurrection and Eternal Life (the prayer of the Liturgy). There is no liturgical prayer for those who have died without belief in the Creator or those excommunicated from communion with God for their evil deeds.

The power of the Blood of Christ compensates for a deficiency of good works, but the love of the friends of reposed Christians who pray for them acts, as it were, on behalf of the departed. Of particular aid to the reposed are the alms that he has given during his life and which his loved ones now give in his stead, after his death. As the Lord said, *I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations* (Lk. 16:9). Prayer in numbers likewise possesses great power, as does prayer combined with reading Holy Scripture. The greatest gift to one who has died is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, offered at the Liturgy.

## THE ORDER AND MEANING OF THE FUNERAL

Immediately after a person's repose the "Canon at the Departure of the Soul from the Body" is read. The reposed is washed, in remembrance of holy baptism, and dressed in new clothes. These hardly need be expensive garments; no one will be needing them after the resurrection. Formerly, departed laymen were clothed in special shrouds reminiscent of the baptismal robe. Clergy are buried in vestments according to their rank.

After the body has been prepared for burial the reading of the Psalter immediately begins (at the body of a priest the Gospel is read), which strengthens the newborn soul in eternity and defends it from the attacks of the demons.

When all is ready for the burial, the body of the deceased is brought into the church that he attended during his lifetime. There the order of the funeral begins, which in ancient times was numbered among the sacraments. This rite strengthens the soul on its path to the heavens and purifies sins. About the coffin candles are lit, as a sign of our prayer for the deceased and reverence for the sanctity of Communion, of which the reposed partook. For our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

The burial begins with the reading of Psalm 90, which promises God's protection to those who hope in Him. After this Psalm 118 is sung, describing the path to blessedness through fulfillment of the Law of God in which the reposed walked. The singing of the psalm alternates with prayers for the departed. A censing takes place, during which the requiem troparia are sung, and the canon begins, in which we ask God to grant rest to the deceased in paradise through the prayers of the martyrs. When the canon ends, in parting with the Christian the Church sings the stichera of John of Damascus in all eight tones. The Commandments of Beatitude point to the sure path to happiness, in which the departed walked. The passages from Scripture (1 Thess. 5, Jn. 5) testify to our chief hope—the resurrection of the dead. The priest reads the prayer of absolution, and in it he forgives those sins of which the deceased has repented. After this all the Christians bid farewell to the reposed, asking his forgiveness, that his path into eternity might not be overshadowed by any grievance. Oil is poured on the body, as a symbol of God's mercy, and it is given over to the earth. To the singing of the Trisagion the body is lowered into the smelting furnace of the earth, that the power of God might transform it, preparing it for resurrection. As a sign of our eternal hope, the cross by which the Lord saved us is placed upon the grave.

## THE PANIKHIDA

**G**od is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mt. 22:32). For this reason Orthodox Christians do not think the dead have vanished. They know that they are alive before the immortal Person. Hence, on days of commemoration (for Christians these are the 3rd, 9th, and 40th days after death, as well as yearly anniversaries), on Saturdays of the Departed (days of special commemoration of the deceased), and other days when love inclines them to remember the names of the departed before that radiant Face, the *panikhida* is served.

Its structure is as follows: after blessing God Almighty the 90th psalm is read, and at the ectenia of peace repose is asked for the deceased, and God's eternal mercy is invoked upon him, and consolation upon his loved ones. The hymn of praise "Alleluia" is sung, and the requiem troparia are chanted, in which the path of blessedness is depicted and we sing in the hope that the reposed walked in this way. Numerous times at the ectenias we are summoned to prayer for our brother or sister who has departed beyond the bounds of death. Psalm 50 is read, followed by the singing of the irmoi of the canon for the deceased. We ask that God grant rest with the saints to our loved one, where there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting. At the end of the panikhida we wish Divine eternal memory to our departed loved ones.

## THE SACRAMENTS



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As we have noted, the source of all good works and the root of spiritual life is the grace of the Holy Spirit. This uncreated power is bestowed upon Christians through special rituals called *sacraments*. These sacred rites that transform a person are not human invention, but were established by the Creator Himself. In the sacraments lies the very heart of Christianity. One may have Orthodox faith, do good works, and pray, but without participation in the sacramental life of the Church a person will never become a Christian and cannot achieve salvation. For while faith gives a proper understanding of God and His providence, good works make one to resemble Him, and prayer enables one to commune with Him, only in the sacraments does true union with God take place, transforming the whole person.

Since the 15th century Orthodox theology has specified seven chief sacraments that unite us with God. The first of these is *baptism*, in which spiritual birth takes place. The second is *chrismation*, which gives strength for spiritual growth and for doing good works. The third is *Holy Communion*, which unites a person bodily with God. The fourth is *repentance*, which heals the soul of sins. The fifth is the *blessing of oil*, which heals physical illnesses caused by sin. The sixth is the sacrament of *matrimony*, which sanctifies the family and physical birth, and gives strength for the upbringing of children. The seventh is the *priesthood*, which produces spiritual fathers who themselves give rebirth to and bring up Christians by the Word of God and performing the sacraments.



## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

The first sacrament, the one with which a person's spiritual life begins, is holy baptism. Without it man's salvation is impossible. According to the catechesis, "Baptism is a sacrament in which a believer, being bodily immersed thrice in water, invoking God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dies to fleshly, sinful life, and is reborn of the Holy Spirit into spiritual, holy life."

Baptism, in the profound understanding of Saint Gregory the Theologian, "is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of Faith, the key of the Kingdom of heaven, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the whole man. Why should I go into further detail? Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the Gifts of God" (Oration 40). A person who has received it receives new sensory organs of the soul, and in him everything assumes its proper place. The mind receives the power to think comprehensively. The heart is cleansed of its burden of the past. The soul receives power for un-earthly rest and eternal joy; for the first time man hears from his conscience not condemnation, but commendation. Whereas prior to baptism the evil power of the devil abode in the person's heart, upon receiving the sacrament the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within the person. Naturally, the evil spirit does not cease to attack the person, acting through the body and through it attempting to darken our mind, but inside any baptized person the indelible grace of God comes to dwell. Hence, if a person has sinned or fallen away from the Church, upon returning he is not rebaptized, but is reunited through repentance. Baptism is a new birth that is never repeated, if it was properly performed.

This great gift is rooted in sacred redemption. In baptism we symbolically die together with Christ as we are immersed in the water, and are resurrected with Him as we emerge from the water. Though this participation in His death takes place symbolically, our salvation is accomplished in deed.

With good reason did Christ the Savior establish this great sacrament of enlightenment after His Resurrection. It was indicated of old by the ancient miracles of salvation, such as the salvation of Noah's family from the flood, the Hebrews' crossing of the Red Sea, and the ritual washing of the Mosaic Law. The way for it was prepared by the baptism of repentance performed by John the Baptist. But it only became a reality after the Sacrifice

of Christ. At His appearance to the disciples in Galilee after the Resurrection He said, *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost* (Mt. 28:18–19). According to church tradition, the Risen Christ Himself baptized the apostles, who in turn passed on this sacrament to all Christians.

## ADULT PREPARATION FOR BAPTISM

142 | If an adult wishes to receive holy baptism it is not enough merely to desire this. Just as merely wishing to be healed is not an adequate course of treatment for a sick person, but rather a daily regimen must be observed, undergoing procedures, taking medicine, and, most importantly, trusting one's physician, so also to begin a life in God one must have true faith, repent of one's evil deeds, and desire to live according to the commandments, which when fulfilled enable the sacrament to take full effect.

The need for faith is obvious. For, as Scripture says, *without faith it is impossible to please [God]: for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him* (Heb. 11:6). There is a measure of the faith that is necessary for baptism. That measure is the Symbol of Faith, which the one being baptized recites from memory before the sacrament itself, and which is preserved in our hearts until death and the Day of Judgment. One who believes only that “there's someone out there” cannot be baptized, and if a person wishes to receive holy baptism he must accept the true faith with all his heart and receive forgiveness of his sins.

Before baptism it is a good thing to read books about the Orthodox faith, so that the sacrament itself might take place consciously, with maximum participation on the part of the one being baptized. Recommendations for spiritual literature may be obtained from the priest, with whom one must meet beforehand.

One wishing to be baptized must read Holy Scripture. The Church recommends that catechumens (the name given those preparing for baptism) read the four Gospels from the New Testament, and from the Old Testament the books of Genesis, Exodus, Proverbs, the Wisdom of Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

During preparation for baptism one must pray fervently that God cleanse one's heart and sanctify one's life. It is particularly essential to visit the temple of God as often as possible. If a person intends to be baptized, to

a certain degree he is already the Church's own. She prays for him as a catechumen, and this maternal care should not be neglected. An unbaptized person prays at the evening service and in the morning at Liturgy, up to the words intoned by the deacon or the priest, "As many as are catechumens depart, catechumens depart; let none of the catechumens remain." Barring extraordinary circumstances, the preparation for baptism lasts forty days. This was the duration of catechesis in the ancient Church, and in Russia before the revolution. During this period a person must change his life, cease working evil deeds, quit any job that is incompatible with Christianity (work in an abortion clinic, prostitution, etc.), and begin to keep the commandments. One must not drag out the time before baptism; otherwise one may die and perish forever.

It must be remembered that if a person intends to be baptized he will be subjected to the attacks of the devil, who does not wish the person to be freed from his enslavement. One should neither fear nor listen to the enemy, but should drive him away with prayer and the sign of the cross. The favorite trap of the devil is busyness. "You have no time today," he says. "Do it tomorrow, or next week, or during vacation." In this way Satan holds some back from baptism for years, and those who take this bait later find it more difficult to lead a Christian life. As Christ said, *No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God* (Lk. 9:62).

In the ancient Church people fasted forty days before baptism. Today at least a three-day fast is considered desirable. This helps to overcome the devil, intensifies prayer, and enables a person to control his heart.

During preparation for the sacrament one must try to remember all one's sins, so as to repent of them before baptism, and try not to repeat them again, as the apostle Peter said: *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:38).

It is a good thing to find a pious Orthodox Christian who can stand godparent and help one to walk toward Christ. This person must not however be a spouse, either current or future; otherwise the marriage will be unlawful. It should be noted that a godparent is obligatory only for children 14 years old and under. An adult may vouch for himself.

Baptisms are served on all days except weekdays of Great Lent. In the ancient Church and in Russia before the revolution the days when baptisms were performed in particular were Great Saturday, the eves of Nativity and Theophany, Lazarus Saturday, and Pentecost.

The night before baptism one must abstain from marital relations. From midnight on one must neither eat nor drink (smokers must also not smoke), so as to commune of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ immediately after

baptism. Women are not baptized during their menstrual periods and for forty days after giving birth, unless their life is in danger.

A person of another faith (a Muslim, Jew, pagan, or sectarian) must undergo the rite of unification prior to baptism.

## INFANT BAPTISM

**I**n the Orthodox Church not only adults are vouchsafed holy baptism, but also infants. In this way we fulfill the words of Christ: *Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And He laid his hands on them, and departed thence* (Mt. 19:14–15).

The express command of the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost tells us that the gift of baptism belongs to all: *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call* (Acts 2:39).

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Naturally, infants do not have personal faith, but this deficiency is supplied by the faith of the parents and the sponsors, or godparents. Scripture gives us an example of this, when Christ healed the paralytic and forgave him his sins according to the faith of his friends (Mt. 9:1–8). The obligations of these sponsors are to teach the infant the faith and Christian life, so that the grace of God might act in him. To this end they not only see to the child's timely education in the Law of God, but also ensure that the child regularly communes of the Holy Mysteries.



A child's baptism is preceded by a series of sacred rites that prepare him for the sacrament and protect him from the onslaught of evil powers. Even before his birth a special moleben is served in which God's help is invoked upon the mother during labor. On the first day after the birth the priest prays that the mother and infant be protected from the attacks of the spirits of evil and that all who participated in the birth be cleansed of the impurity of original sin. On the eighth day the priest gives the newborn a name, just as the Lord was given the sacred name Jesus on the eighth day after the Nativity (Lk. 2:21). On the fortieth day the infant is brought to the temple to be presented to the Creator (Lk. 2:22–38). Prayers of purification are read over the mother, healing her of the devil's touch (at the moment of the transmission of the ancestral death) and admitting her to Communion. For unless at risk of death a woman may not partake of Communion for forty days after giving birth.

If the infant is weak or sickly, the sacrament of baptism must not be delayed for any great length of time. In this case the child must be baptized immediately after birth. Otherwise if the child dies he will not be able to

enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5).<sup>58</sup> According to the canons of the Church, parents (or a priest) who carelessly allow an infant to die unbaptized are to be severely punished.

## THE RITE OF BAPTISM

146 | The order of the sacrament of baptism dates back to ancient times, and its basic elements were established by the apostles themselves. By removing his outer garment the one being baptized shows his readiness to renounce his former sinful life. The priest signs him with the cross, setting him apart for God, and blows into his face, restoring the breath by which man was formed (Gen. 2:7), and reads a prayer in which he is given a Christian name (at baptism some change their names, as a sign of their change of life). At the sacrament this name is written in the Book of Life. The newly-baptized also becomes the namesake of one of the saints in heaven, who becomes his patron. The day when a Christian's heavenly patron is commemorated is his chief personal feast day.

After this the exorcisms are read, addressed to the devil, to whom all the unbaptized belong. At times the enemy attempts to keep a person firmly grasped in his paws, and for this reason attacks him during the baptism. Once a woman who was a drug addict was being baptized, and during the exorcisms she was in torment. When the time came for her to read the Symbol of Faith she began to suffocate, and in the font she nearly fainted, but the moment she was immersed the third time all this passed. This occurred because through this passion the devil had an especially strong hold on her, but the power of God proved incomparably more powerful. There is no reason to fear the devil; one must drive him out with the name of Jesus Christ, and he will promptly flee. For we have been given power to trample all the power of the devil (Lk. 10:19), and it cannot harm us if we are with God. Thus, one must not fear the evil eye, or spells, or sorcerers; rather, one should zealously keep the commandments, and no spiritual evil will approach a Christian. For this reason the priest likewise shows no timidity before the devil, but drives him out with authority by the power of God.

The moment arrives for the one who has been freed from the power of the enemy to renounce him. Three times the priest asks, “**Do you wish to renounce Satan, all his works, all his angels** [demons in the guise of pagan gods,

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<sup>58</sup> *Editor's note:* This reflects the author's personal view, and does not represent the official teaching of the Orthodox Church.



cosmic energies, etc.], **all his service** [magic, other religions, astrology, etc.], **and all his pride** [public spectacles that render a person mindless]?”

The one being baptized answers, **“I do.”** Then he blows and spits toward the west, into the realm of darkness, expelling all impurity from within him.

After this the priest asks him whether he is ready to be united to Christ, to enter into an eternal union with Him, and upon hearing his declaration of assent asks, **“Do you believe in Him?”**

The one being baptized answers, **“I believe in Him as King and God,”** and swears fealty to Him by reading the Symbol of Faith.

After this the priest blesses the water, having first censed it. The water thereby returns to the state in which it was on the first day of creation, when there was darkness over the deep and the Spirit of God moved upon the waters (Gen. 1:2). We recall how the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea, led by the pillars of cloud and of fire, and how Pharaoh and all his armies perished in the waves. In the same way the catechumen, led by Christ, receives salvation in the water, while the devil is drowned in it.

After the blessing of the water the priest anoints the water and the one being baptized with blessed oil. This is the oil of gladness, anointing with which gives one the power to slip through the paws of the enemy, just as the wrestlers of old covered themselves with oil so as to slip through the hands of an opponent. This oil should be rubbed over one's whole body.

Then comes the most important moment of all. The person descends into the font, and the hand of the priest (and through that hand, Christ Himself) immerses him in the water thrice with the words, **“The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father. Amen. And of the Son. Amen. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”**

According to the church Typicon, baptism must take place through triple full immersion in water, either in a font or in an open water body. This is the apostolic practice. However, if circumstances do not permit full immersion (for example, in the army, in prison, in a hospital, in a desert, or when there is an acute water shortage), baptism by effusion (pouring) is permissible and fully valid, as long as water is poured over the entire body, or, in extreme circumstances, the head.

Upon emerging from the water we should not forget to pray to God to cleanse us Himself and teach us to live a Christian life. For the water of baptism is entirely permeated with the power of the Holy Spirit.

When the newly-baptized person (in Greek, the *neophyte*) emerges from the water newly born, sinless, and holy, he is vested in a cross (as a symbol of enduring sorrows for Christ's sake) and a white shirt (as a sign of purity and innocence), and he is given a lit candle, in memory of Christ's words: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven* (Mt. 5:16).



## THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISMATION

After this the priest prays, then imparts a new sacrament: that of chrismation, when in the anointing of the forehead, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, chest, hands, and feet with holy chrism the gift of the Holy Spirit enters into the newly-baptized. This gives the person the power to do good works and makes the human personality steadfast in eternal invocation of God.

According to Saint Symeon of Thessalonica, “chrismation impresses a seal and restores the image of God, which was damaged in us through disobedience, as well as grace, which we received in our souls through God’s breathing. It holds the power of the Spirit, is the treasury of His fragrance, and comprises the standard and the seal of Christ.”

This sacrament was prefigured in the Lord’s Baptism. When He came out of the water the Spirit of God rested upon Him, so as to pass on to those who would be baptized together with Him. The fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles (and through them to us) on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It was then that the Holy Spirit descended upon them in the form of tongues of fire, filling them and pouring into them the power of Christ’s redemption.

Holy chrism is made during Great Lent using several dozen fragrant oils, to the reading of the Holy Gospel. It is blessed by a bishop (usually the patriarch) at the Liturgy on Great Thursday, and to it is added some chrism that has been preserved since apostolic times. In the ancient Church the very rite of blessing chrism was also considered a separate sacrament. Besides the sacrament of chrismation, holy chrism is used to consecrate temples and for the rite of an emperor’s coronation.

Through chrismation a person may worthily bear the name of Christian, for he participates in the anointing of Christ the Savior—i.e., in the Holy Spirit. Every chrismated person becomes a king and a priest of God.

After the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, as a sign that the newly-baptized has entered into an eternal union with Christ he walks around the font three times to the singing of the words of the apostle Paul, *“As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (cf. Gal. 3:27), with the addition of the exclamation, *“Alleluia!”* (“Praise Him Who Is!”).

Passages dealing with the significance of baptism are read from the New Testament (Rom. 6:3–11, Mt. 28:16–20). After this the seal of chrismation is washed from the newly-baptized, and his head is shorn cruciformly, as a reminder that from henceforth it must contain only God-pleasing thoughts.

Formerly this rite was performed on the eighth day after baptism. Throughout this entire time the person wore the white robes and communed daily (giving rise to a number of liturgical peculiarities of Bright Week, the

first week after Pascha). In contemporary practice, however, this is all usually performed in one day.

Then follows the rite of churching, when the new children of the Heavenly Father are presented to Him. The baptized person is led into the church and stands before the iconostasis. If a man, he enters the altar. Thus it is made manifest to all that the Church now has new members, kings and priests, who reign over their hearts and in them offer sacrifice to God all their lives.

## THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST

The greatest sacrament of the Church is Holy Communion, when in the form of bread and wine Christians commune of the true Body and Blood of Christ the Savior. This sacrament, foreshadowed in the Savior's talk in Capernaum (Jn. 6), was established by Him on the eve of His sufferings, at the Last Supper. Through this great Sacrament the Orthodox are united with God Himself. We believe that the Body of the Lord, which He Himself offers in Sacrifice to the Life-creating Trinity (through the bishop or, at his commission, through the presbyter) is in essence, in nature, and in reality the very same Body that He took from the Most-pure Virgin Mary, which was nailed to the Cross, rose, and ascended, enlivened by a rational soul and inseparable from His Divinity. Through this "we are made of one body and one blood with Christ. Thus we are made to be Christ-bearers, because the Body and Blood of Christ are communicated to our members."<sup>59</sup> The sinless Flesh and Blood of the Lord cleanse our nature from sin, changing us, and we become members of the true Body of Christ, thereby establishing the Church, *for the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin* (1 Jn. 1:7).

Up until the remembrance of the most holy and originative words of Christ and the invocation of the Spirit and Comforter these are bread and wine, and for this reason in the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great (as well as by Saint Hippolytus of Rome) they are called the *antitype*. "The bread was not the Body of Christ prior to its consecration; but after consecration, I say to you, it is already the Body of Christ. *He said, and it came to be; He commanded, and they were created.*"<sup>60</sup> However, after the wondrous action of God, which is incomprehensible for the created mind, the substance of the bread is transmuted, transformed, translated, transubstantiated, made to be the true Body of Christ. The wine also changes, becoming what it was not before—the Blood that was shed on Golgotha. Moreover, so that men might partake of

<sup>59</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 4:3

<sup>60</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Catechetical Lectures*, III, 6

the Most-holy Mysteries without fear, the form (or type) of bread and wine is retained, though in essence they are now the Body and Blood of God the Word. As Saint Cyril of Jerusalem aptly stated, “the visible bread is not bread, even if it is such to the taste, but the Body of Christ; and the visible wine is not wine, even if taste thinks it such, but the Blood of Christ.”<sup>61</sup> “Even if the sensory organs tell us one thing, we ought to heed them no longer, but rather the Word of God, for in this lies the labor of faith. For, having partaken of the Holy Mysteries, we receive the power to do good works. In us the powers of the future age begin to act, transfiguring us and healing us of the malady of spiritual death.”<sup>62</sup> As the Lord said, one who does not partake of His Flesh and Blood cannot be saved (Jn. 6:53).

## HOW OFTEN TO COMMUNE

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Participation in the most-holy Sacrament of Communion is wonderful and salvific. It gives us strength unto the restoration of our soul. According to Saint Basil the Great, “it is good and beneficial to commune daily,” as was the practice in the apostolic Church. However, one must guard against allowing the Sacrament to become a habit, for then Communion may be unto condemnation. For this reason the Church does not permit one to commune more frequently than once a day, showing the unrepeatable of the Sacrifice on Golgotha. On the other hand, the holy canons (the 9th canon of the holy apostles and the 2nd canon of the Council of Antioch) require that one commune at every Liturgy. And the 80th canon of the Council of Trullo imposes a penalty upon those who unnecessarily abstain from participation in the Liturgy for three weeks running. Based on this, daily communion would be the norm, while communing once in three weeks would be the minimum. As a result of the fact that many began to abstain from Communion for long periods of time, in the 18th and 19th centuries the Church required that people commune not less than once a year, on penalty of excommunication.

Many believe that infrequent communion is conducive to participating more worthily in the Holy Mysteries. But this is an error. According to Saint John Chrysostom, “it is not infrequency of communion that make one worthy, but purity of heart.” He gives this example: suppose a king invites a person to a feast. The person comes, but refuses to sit down to table, explaining that he

<sup>61</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 4:9

<sup>62</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Moral Rules*, 8

is unworthy. Will he not incur the king's anger for his disobedience? Hence, one ought to purify one's soul before the Liturgy, rather than refuse to be purified, citing one's unworthiness.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR COMMUNION

This purification consists of special preparation of one's soul. In the Russian Church practice this is called *govenie*. This preparation lasts several days, and concerns both a person's physical and spiritual life. The body is prescribed abstinence, i.e., physical purity and moderation in food (fasting). The mind must not wander, distracted by minor daily concerns. During the days of preparation, if circumstances permit, one should attend the divine services in the church and be more diligent in fulfilling one's prayer rule at home.

The evening before Communion one must be present at the evening service. At home, in addition to the usual prayers before sleep, one should read the following canons: the canon of repentance to the Lord, the canon of intercession to the Most-holy Theotokos, the canon to the guardian angel, and, if desired, the akathist to Sweetest Jesus. The Order of Preparation for Holy Communion is also read—the canon in the evening, and the rest of the order after the morning prayers. After midnight one does not eat or drink, for the holy canons require that one approach the Holy Chalice on an empty stomach. The evening before, in the evening or in the morning, before the Liturgy, one must make confession, so as to be cleansed of all the sins one has committed.

## THE RITE OF THE DIVINE LITURGY

The Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist is the basis of the most important Christian worship service, called the Liturgy (from the Greek word meaning “common work”). It is performed in the church, which is also a liturgical image of the world, a “semblance of the universe,” and an image of the upper room of the Mystical Supper. In the Eastern Orthodox Church there are two rites of the Liturgy that are universally employed—the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom (on a daily basis) and the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great (ten times per year). The first is shorter, while the second is longer and more solemn. The structure of the service, however, dates back to the first Liturgy that the Lord served on the eve of His sufferings.

The rite of the Sacrament is permeated with heavenly symbolism. It raises us up from the earth to the contemplation of the secret paths of Divine Providence. In accordance with the Lord's words, during the Liturgy we recall His entire ministry of salvation, beginning with the Nativity and ending with the Ascension. In addition, however, the Eucharist itself leads into the state of future joy, when the multitudes of the saved will offer up a hymn of thanksgiving to the Creator and Redeemer.

In the order of the Liturgy three parts may be distinguished: the *proskomede*, the Liturgy of the catechumens, and the Liturgy of the faithful. The *proskomede* (a Greek word meaning "offering") is performed without the participation of the people. Before the service begins the priest and the deacon read the prayers upon entering the altar, vest in the sacred vestments, and wash their hands. The deacon approaches the table of oblation and prepares the sacred vessels for the service. These are the *chalice* for the Blood of the Lord, the *diskos* (a plate on a pedestal) for the Body of Christ, the *star* (two arches joined to form a cross, symbolizing the star of Bethlehem), the *spear* (a spear-shaped knife), and the *spoon* (used for communion, symbolizing the tongs with which the seraph took the coal to purify the lips of the prophet Isaiah—Is. 6:6). Five *prosphora* (sacred leavened loaves of bread) and wine are also offered. The *proskomede* itself begins, symbolizing Christ's Nativity and His Crucifixion.

With the spear the priest cuts a cube-shaped portion from one of the *prosphora*, places it on the *diskos*, and incises and pierces it, reading the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the redemptive Sacrifice of Christ (Is. 53). This bread is called the Lamb. By the power of the Holy Spirit it is changed into the Body of the Lord. The remainder of the *prosphoron* is called the *antidoron* (a Greek word meaning "instead of the gift"), of which those who could not commune at the Liturgy partake. A mixture of water and wine is poured into the chalice, to the reading of the Gospel words concerning the pierced side of the Savior, from which there flowed blood and water.

After this the priest removes particles from the remaining *prosphora* and places them around the Lamb. The second *prosphoron* is offered in honor of the Theotokos; the third—in honor of the nine ranks of saints; the fourth—for Christians still living; and the fifth—for the departed. In this manner an image of the Church assembled around Christ is formed on the *diskos*. After all the people have been commemorated (at which time the particles are removed for those for whom commemoration slips have been submitted) the priest covers the Gifts with the star and the coverings, signifying the swaddling clothes of the Newborn Christ and His burial shroud. In the censuring the Holy Spirit enshrouds the gifts offered. After a prayer the deacon censes the altar and the entire church. According to the explanation of Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, this signifies God's going forth from His boundless glory into this world to sanctify and to save it.

After the censuring the Liturgy of the catechumens begins. It is so called because at this Liturgy the unbaptized may be present. The priest blesses the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity, into which we enter in the Sacrament. The deacon summons Christians to pray for the whole world (in the great ectenia, or the ectenia of peace), and the choir sings three antiphons (psalms and other biblical passages, sung by two choirs alternately in imitation of the angelic choirs). These hymns remind us of the prophecies fulfilled by Christ and the expectation of ancient mankind. After the third antiphon the small entry takes place. The deacon carries the Gospel out of the altar, as a symbol of Christ going forth to preach. A candle is carried before it—an image of John the Baptist. The priest asks God that the heavenly hosts enter into the temple together with us. The Gospel is carried into the altar. On behalf of all the Christians the choir sings a hymn in worship of the Lord. During the small entry Saint Seraphim of Sarov once saw Christ, surrounded by a countless multitude of blessed spirits, entering the altar at this moment.

Glorifying those who have kept the Gospel commandments, the choir sings hymns in honor of the saints. The priest then prays and blesses the participation of all Christians in the glorification of the triune Divinity. The Trisagion is triumphantly sung. Saint John Chrysostom writes concerning this: “Amazing—in the heavens the seraphim sing the Trisagion hymn, and on earth men take up the hymn. Thus a tuneful choir of heavenly and earthly beings is formed. The Father conceived it, the Son accomplished it, and its director is the Holy Spirit.”

After glorifying the Trinity the Church listens to the teaching of the apostles of Christ, whom He sent on before Him to preach. During the singing of another angelic hymn, “Alleluia,” the deacon censes the altar, rendering honor to the Gospel and reminding us of the words of Scripture: *For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life* (2 Cor. 2:15–16).

The peak of the Liturgy of the catechumens is the reading of the Gospel, which symbolizes the Lord’s good news. One ascetic saw how during the reading of the Word of God tongues of fire proceeded from the deacon’s mouth and ascended to the heavens. Hence, all Orthodox listen to God’s command with reverence. After the reading of the Gospel the priest explains what was read based on the interpretation of the holy fathers, so that Christians and those wishing to become Christians might properly fulfill the words they have heard. The deacon invites all to pray for the particular needs of Christians (in the ectenia of fervent supplication and sometimes the ectenia for the departed), and for the conversion of the unbaptized (i.e., the catechumens) to Christ. After this the catechumens must leave the temple. Next begins the

most important part of the Eucharist: the Liturgy of the faithful, at which only the baptized may be present.

The choir begins to sing the Cherubic Hymn: “Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim, and chant the thrice-holy hymn unto the Life-creating Trinity, now lay aside all earthly care, that we may receive the King of all, Who cometh invisibly upborne in triumph by the ranks of angels. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.”

In simple language this would sound as follows: “Let us, mystically depicting the Cherubim and singing the thrice-holy song to the Trinity Who gives life, now put aside all care for the things of this life, so that we may glorify the King of all, Whom the angelic hosts invisibly carry and glorify. Praise Him Who Is.”

During the singing of this hymn the great entry takes place, symbolizing Christ’s going to His sufferings. The priest and the deacon transfer the Holy Gifts, preceded by candles, from the table of oblation to the holy table. The remaining priests bear the cross and the spear—the instruments of Christ’s sufferings. As Saint Symeon explains, the clergy symbolize Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who buried the Lord. The doors close and the curtain is drawn—a reminder of the stone with which the tomb of Christ was sealed.

After the ectenia of supplication, in which the deacon invites Christians to pray that the Gifts be received by God, in the altar the priests exchange the kiss of love. This points to the Lord’s commandment that prohibited those who hate each other from offering the Gifts.

The whole Church triumphantly confesses the Symbol of Faith, for without faith communion will be unto judgment and condemnation. During the singing of the Symbol the priest waves a covering (the *aer*) over the Gifts, in remembrance of the earthquake that occurred at the Lord’s death and resurrection.

After the Symbol of Faith the most important part of the Liturgy begins: the Eucharistic Canon, or the *anaphora* (“oblation”)—a special prayer during which the Gifts are transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. After blessing all in the name of the Trinity and summoning all to lift up their hearts to the heavens, the priest begins to give thanks to God the Father. He glorifies Him for the greatness and incomprehensibility of His nature, gives thanks to Him for the creation of the world and for our salvation, and gives glory to Him for having received our prayer as well. In answer the choir sings the hymn of the seraphim: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth [i.e., of the heavenly hosts]. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

The priest meanwhile continues to recall the saving work of God the Son, Who became incarnate and granted us salvation, and on the night of His sufferings made bread to be His Body, and wine to be His Blood. In a loud voice, the priest intones the words of Christ, showing that the same Christ is now



performing this service. At this moment the altar is the upper room of the Mystical Supper. After this the priest recalls the work of the Redemption itself—the death and Resurrection of Christ—and lifting up the Heavenly Gifts he exclaims, “**Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee in behalf of all and for all.**”

The peak of all the prayers is reached: the priest prays God the Father to send the Holy Spirit from the heights of heaven to transform the Holy Gifts. We believe that it is at this moment that the bread becomes the Body of Christ, and the wine—His Blood. Bowing down before Christ Who has appeared upon the holy table, the priest asks that this Communion sanctify the people and incline God to be merciful toward our sins. He recalls all the saints that have already been sanctified, and particularly emphasizes the Most-pure Theotokos, in whose honor the Church immediately sings the hymn “It is Truly Meet” or a similar hymn. The deacon censes the Body and Blood, thereby showing God-befitting honor to the Lord Jesus. The priest asks that this Sacrifice be accepted on behalf of the world, the authorities, Orthodox bishops, parishioners, and all those in need of the help of the Creator.

At the end of the prayer of oblation the deacon again summons all to prayer (in the ectenia of supplication), the whole church assembly makes bold to call upon the Heavenly God their Father, and the Lord’s Prayer is sung.

Following it the priest raises the Body of Christ and exclaims, calling all Christians to holiness, “**Holy things are for the holy.**” The choir sings on behalf of all the Christians: “**One is holy, one is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.**” In the closed altar the clergy commune. Then the doors are opened, and the deacon brings the chalice out with the words, “**With the fear of God and with faith, draw nigh,**” symbolizing the first appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples. The choir replies, “**Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. God is the Lord and hath appeared unto us.**” The priest communes the faithful.

The faithful approach the chalice with faith, the fear of God, and love, remembering the death, Resurrection, and Second Coming of Christ, hands crossed upon their breasts as a sign of our salvation. The right is placed over the left as a reminder that evil deeds must be conquered in us by good deeds, which will set us at the right hand of Christ the Judge. Each should loudly and clearly state his baptized name, since God is entering into personal communion with us. After receiving the Holy Mysteries the communicant drinks wine with warm water, lest any particle of the Body of Christ should accidentally fall, and also eats a piece of prosphoron.

When Communion is over the deacon places the particles removed for the living and the dead into the chalice, that their sins might be washed away by the Blood of Christ. After this the Gifts are transferred from the holy table to the table of oblation, where the deacon consumes them. This last appearance of the Holy Mysteries to the faithful symbolizes Christ’s Ascension into

heaven. The priest reads the final prayer and brings the cross out to be kissed, then dismisses the Christians to the doing of good works.

A communicant must absolutely either listen to the thanksgiving prayers after Holy Communion in the church or else read them on his own at home.

## THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

**I**f the Lord only cleansed sins in baptism, few indeed would be saved. But in His mercy He has given us a second cleansing, also called a second baptism: the baptism by tears. Even before the Crucifixion, Christ promised to give the apostles the power “to bind and to loose” sins (Mt. 18:18). Then after the Resurrection, on the evening of Pascha, He did so, blowing upon the apostles and saying, *Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained* (Jn. 20:22–23). On the basis of this gift the Church has the sacrament of repentance, in which the successor of the apostles—the bishop or the priest—for-gives the confessed sins of a penitent.

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As Saint Symeon writes, “by repentance our correction from sins we have committed anew is accomplished. And since after baptism there is no means of being called to salvation, by grace and as a gift, other than feats and labors, other than repentance and tears, other than confession of transgressions and withdrawing from evil, for this reason this great gift was given.” The rite of confession may be performed at any time in the church. After the reading of a series of prayers the penitent declares the Symbol of Faith, then repents of his sins, naming each of them. When all the person’s iniquities have been named and he has promised not to repeat them again, the priest may read the prayer of forgiveness. If a grave sin has been committed, by way of treatment the priest imposes a spiritual medicine, called a penance, upon the sinner, to treat the symptoms of the sinful ailment.

After confession a person receives not only forgiveness, but also the power not to repeat the sin again, though one must still exert one’s entire will in the fight against sin.

## MONASTICISM

**M**onasticism is a special celibate service to God, closely linked to the sacrament of repentance. It was established by the Lord Jesus, Who was Himself Virgin, and was also born of the Virgin. He said, *For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which*



*were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it* (Mt. 19:12). Eunuchs for Christ's sake are not those who have disfigured their bodies, but those who have decided to preserve their purity for God's sake. The apostles John the Theologian, Paul, Andrew, and Barnabus were all monks. The apostle Paul says that one who remains a virgin is more blessed than one who enters into marriage. He does better than one who marries, for he cares only for how to please the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. This does not mean that marriage is bad, however—only that monasticism is higher (1 Cor. 7:25–40).



Monasticism may only be entered voluntarily. This ascetic labor is grounded in three vows: chastity, non-possessiveness, and obedience, sealed by the tonsure. One who wishes to receive these must first be tried in obedience, and only then receive the tonsure. When a person's hair is tonsured his name is changed, as a sign that he is beginning a new, penitential life. He is clothed in special clothes that signify the complete subjection of his will to God. In the Russian Church monasticism is divided into *the small schema* and the *great schema*, which differ in the degree of strictness of their vows.

There are only three acceptable reasons for which one may enter monasticism: a desire to cleanse one's sins, a desire to earn greater rewards in the Kingdom of Heaven, or an aspiration to please God the Father as a son.

According to the teaching of the Church, monastic service gives a person the semblance of an angel, and hence is superior to marital cohabitation. For already here on earth monks are called to live as citizens of heaven.

## THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE (MATRIMONY)

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For Orthodox Christians marriage is not merely a form of social contract, but a sacrament, a matter that concerns not only man, but also God. In the definition of the Catechesis, "by the free promise of the groom and bride before the priest and the Church of their mutual conjugal fidelity their conjugal union is blessed, as an image of the spiritual union between Christ and the Church, and the grace of pure oneness of soul is invoked upon them, for the blessed procreation and Christian upbringing of children."

Marriage was first established in paradise by the Creator Himself (Gen. 2:24). When Christ came to earth He blessed the wedding in Cana of Galilee, working His first miracle at the wedding: the changing of the water into wine (Jn. 2:1–11). The Lord taught that God unites those who are joining in matrimony, and hence commands that this union not be sundered (Mt. 19:5–6).

In an Orthodox family there is neither democracy nor tyranny. The husband is the image of Christ, the head of the family, the protector and guide of the wife, and the chief upbringer of the children. He is answerable to Christ and must become the religious leader of the family; he is solely responsible for everything. At the same time the husband must honor his wife as a co-heir of the life of grace. The wife is an image of the Church, the helper of the husband. She must honor her husband and be obedient to him in all things that do not contradict the commandments. All issues must be resolved based on the principle of Christ's love.





Both spouses raise the children, neither allowing egoism to develop in them nor crushing their Divinely-created personality. From their earliest childhood years they must be inculcated with love for the Law of God.

The sacrament itself takes place in the church, not during the fasts, on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. In Russia only those who have first registered their marriage at the civil registry office may enter matrimony. This is because a person who refuses to take on even a minimal degree of responsibility before the state cannot be given responsibility before God. Another reason is that the church canons and the Law of God prohibit people who are closely related from entering into marriage. Civil registration of the marriage helps to avoid incest.

Those wishing to be married must first make confession and commune of the Holy Mysteries. The book of church laws, called *The Rudder*, requires

that those wishing to wed know the Symbol of Faith, the Ten Commandments, and the Commandments of Beatitude.

Matrimony is performed during the day. The couple should bring a white cloth, the rings, icons of Christ and the Mother of God, and large candles. The sacrament begins with the betrothal, which is performed in the back of the church. The priest blesses the newlyweds, and hands them lighted candles as a sign of the chastity of the bridal couple, and censes them, guarding them from every evil. Then the rite of the betrothal itself begins. After several prayers the newlyweds exchange rings with the help of the priest, as a sign of the eternity of their union. The husband receives the ring of the wife, and the wife—of the husband.

Following the betrothal the priest leads the newlyweds into the center of the church, as the choir sings Psalm 127. The priest asks whether the bridal couple is marrying by mutual consent. If such proves to be the case, the sacrament of matrimony then begins with the glorification of the Kingdom of the Holy Trinity. After the ectenia of peace three prayers call down God's blessing upon the bridal couple.

The culmination of the sacred rite is reached: crowns are placed upon the groom and bride, as a reward for their chastity and an indication of the crowns of kings and martyrs. The priest blesses them, thereby performing the sacrament itself. The groom becomes an image of Christ, and the bride—of the Church.

Scriptural passages are read (Eph. 5:20–33, Jn. 2:1–11) explaining the significance of marriage. A prayer is read asking that the marriage be preserved spotless.

After the singing of the Lord's Prayer, husband and wife drink from the common cup, as an image of their future life together. Then three times they circle the analogion on which the Gospel lies, as an image of the eternity of their wedding vows, which must be rooted in the Gospel.

The husband and the wife are commanded to rejoice and fulfill the will of the Lord, as did the ancient patriarchs and their wives, and the sacrament is concluded with the solemn blessing of the newlyweds in the great name of the Holy Trinity.

## THE SACRAMENT OF UNCTION (BLESSING OF OIL)

One of the most important works of the Lord on the earth was the restoration of the body of man that had been distorted by sin. He healed illnesses, cast out evil spirits, and raised the dead. That this work might continue



throughout history, Jesus Christ established the sacrament of the blessing of oil. Even during His earthly ministry the apostles anointed the sick with olive oil and they were healed (Mk. 6:13), and after Christ's Ascension His disciples continued the work of freeing people from the contagion of sin and death, manifested in illnesses. In fulfilling this will of God the apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, established the rite of the sacrament of healing. The apostle James writes thus: *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him* (Jas. 5:14–15).

To this day in the churches this holy sacrament is imparted “unto the cleansing and sanctification of those who turn back from their sins. For this reason oil bestows remission of sins, restores from illnesses, and performs sanctification. All this was handed down by Jesus Christ our God, and according to His will by His divine disciples” (Saint Symeon of Thessalonica). In Russian this sacrament of the blessing of oil, or *unction*, is called *soborovanie*, from the word *sobor*, or “assembly,” because it must (normally) be performed by seven priests (i.e., an assembly of priests).

The sacred order of this sacrament is as follows: a special vessel of olive oil is placed on a little table, into which wine (as a symbol of the Blood of Christ) or water (a sign of baptism) is subsequently poured. Grains of wheat are sprinkled into it as a sign of life born of death (Jn. 2:24), and seven candles are lit as an image of the sevenfold light of the Holy Spirit. Seven priests read the canon for the sick person, then bless oil for the anointing. At this time the people sing troparia to the saints that God might heal the sufferer by their prayers. Then the anointing itself takes place: seven passages are read from the epistles and the Gospels, seven prayers are read, and seven times the brow, nostrils, cheeks, lips, chest, and both sides of the hands are anointed with holy oil. At the end of the sacrament the Gospel is placed on the head of the sick person, and the priest asks God to forgive him all his sins.

## THE SACRAMENT OF THE PRIESTHOOD (ORDINATION)

The seventh sacrament, without which the others are not even possible, is the sacrament of the priesthood. It is also called ordination, or *cheirotomia*. Through the laying of the bishop's hands upon the candidate for ordination the Holy Spirit descends upon him as upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4), and appoints him to the service of the Church. The sacrament of the priesthood was established by Christ the Savior Himself. When



He began to preach He chose first twelve, then seventy apostles, to whom He gave the power to heal illnesses, to drive out demons, and to preach the Kingdom of God (Mt. 10:1–5; Mk. 6:7–13; Lk. 9:1–6, 10:1–24). After His Resurrection He appeared to the twelve apostles and by breathing upon them gave them the power of the Holy Spirit to bind and to loose sins (Jn. 20:22–23). Thus the sacrament of the priesthood was established.

The candidate for ordination must meet certain moral criteria. He must not have committed mortal sins since his baptism, nor be remarried or married to a woman previously married. Since the 7th century bishops in the Orthodox Church have only been selected from among monastics, while priests and deacons may be either monastics or married.

The sacrament of the priesthood always takes place at the Liturgy. A deacon is ordained after the Eucharistic Canon, for he is not the performer of the Sacrament, but a servant. A priest is ordained after the Cherubic Hymn, so that he can perform his first Liturgy. A bishop is ordained before the reading of the epistle, so that he can interpret the Scripture and himself perform ordinations.

A deacon or a priest is ordained by one bishop, while a bishop is ordained by an assembly of bishops (no fewer than two or three). At his ordina-

tion the candidate is led into the altar, and the church assembly expresses its accord for his election by exclaiming, "Axios!" (meaning "Worthy!"). He is led around the holy table three times and made to kneel before it. The bishop lays hands upon him and calls upon the Holy Spirit to perform the sacrament. After the bestowal of heavenly grace upon the newly-ordained the sacred vestments befitting his rank are put on him.

The ordination of a bishop takes place with greater pomp. The candidate is selected by a council of bishops. On the eve of his ordination he confesses the Orthodox Faith in detail and promises to preserve the laws of the Church. On the day of his ordination he is led into the altar; an assembly of bishops places the Gospel upon the head of the candidate, and all the bishops lay their hands upon him and invoke the Holy Spirit. The newly-ordained bishop is vested in the appropriate vestments, and he himself ordains a new priest and gives his first sermon.



## Part VI

# THE SACRED HISTORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



### THE IMPORTANCE OF SACRED HISTORY FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

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**W**e have outlined the foundations for the spiritual life that leads us to the heavens. But, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Many will say that what we have said is all well and good, but impracticable for ordinary people. Hence, it is essential not only to describe what must be done, but to show how people have walked the path of God. In the words of Pascal, our God is the Lord of history. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the God of philosophers and academics. To better know Him one must observe His actions in history. Only thus will we be able to discern both the Creator's intention for us and our own place in the great work of the salvation of the world.

All these sacred events did not simply occur by chance. As the apostle Paul said, *all these things ... are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come* (1 Cor. 10:11) ... *that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope* (Rom. 15:4). It is no accident that Saint Basil the Great wrote, "The study of inspired Scripture is the chief way of finding our duty, for in it we find both instruction about conduct and the lives of blessed men, delivered in writing, as some breathing images of godly living, for the imitation of their good works. Hence, in whatever respect each one feels himself deficient, devoting himself to this imitation, he finds, as from some dispensary, the due medicine for his ailment. ... Thus, generally, as painters, when they are painting from other pictures, constantly look at the model,

and do their best to transfer its lineaments to their own work, so too must he who is desirous of rendering himself perfect in all branches of excellency, keep his eyes turned to the lives of the saints as though to living and moving statues, and make their virtue his own by imitation.”<sup>63</sup>

In sacred history we find both superb examples of sanctity and also terrible punishment for sin. Hence, in reading descriptions of sacred events we must not merely take them into account, but rather, imitating the virtues, we must flee from sin so as to reach God.

Orthodox Christians also remember that the saints whose labors we glorify have not disappeared into nonexistence, but now live with the Creator. Hence, at the end of the written life of any saint we note the day of his commemoration by the Church; we include a festive hymn (his troparion or kontakion), if there be such, in fulfillment of the words of Solomon, *The memory of the just is blessed* (Prov. 10:7); and we ask the pious reader to glorify the saint of whose labors he has just read.

## GOD'S ETERNAL EXISTENCE PRIOR TO CREATION

**B**efore all beginnings and the existence of the universe God always existed, reigning in His glory as Creator. He cries out through the prophet, *Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am He* (Is. 41:4).

How can a created mind comprehend the uncreated eternity of the Creator? The great theologian and holy hierarch Gregory, contemplating existence before the dawn of time, cries out: “God always was and always is, and always will be; or rather, God always Is. For Was and Will Be are fragments of our time, and of changeable nature. But He is Eternal Being; and this is the Name He gives Himself when giving the Oracles to Moses in the Mount (Ex. 3:14). For in Himself He sums up and contains all Being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future ... like some great Sea of Being, limitless and unbounded, transcending all conception of time and nature, only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily ... not by His Essentials but by His Environment, one image being got from one source and another from another, and combined into some sort of presentation of the truth, which escapes us before we have caught it, and which takes to flight before we have conceived it, blazing forth upon our master-part, even when that is cleansed, as the lightning flash which

<sup>63</sup> St. Basil the Great, epistle to Gregory the Theologian.

will not stay its course does upon our sight ... in order, as I conceive, by that part of it which we can comprehend to draw us to itself (for that which is altogether incomprehensible is outside the bounds of hope, and not within the compass of endeavour); and by that part of It which we cannot comprehend to move our wonder; and as an object of wonder to become more an object of desire; and being desired, to purify; and purifying to make us like God; so that, when we have become like Himself, God may, to use a bold expression, hold converse with us as God; being united to us, and known by us; and that perhaps to the same extent as He already knows those who are known to Him (1 Cor. 13:12).

“The Divine Nature, then, is boundless and hard to understand, and all that we can comprehend of Him is His boundlessness; even though one may conceive that because He is of a simple Nature He is therefore either wholly incomprehensible or perfectly comprehensible. For let us farther enquire what is implied by “is of a simple Nature”? For it is quite certain that this simplicity is not itself its nature, just as composition is not by itself the essence of compound beings. And when Infinity is considered from two points of view, beginning and end (for that which is beyond these and not limited by them is Infinity), when the mind looks into the depths above, not having where to stand, and leans upon phænomena to form an idea of God it calls the Infinite and Unapproachable which it finds there by the name of Unoriginate. And when it looks into the depth below and at the future, it calls Him Undying and Imperishable. And when it draws a conclusion from the whole, it calls Him Eternal. For Eternity is neither time nor part of time; for it cannot be measured. But what time measured by the course of the sun is to us, that Eternity is to the Everlasting; namely a sort of time-like movement and interval.”<sup>64</sup>

And in this eternity that cannot be measured by any created mind the three Persons abide in the eternal movement of love. The Father passionately begets the Son of His essence, and in the begetting imparts everything to Him—His mind, power, and good pleasure—He Himself losing nothing thereby, as a candle that lights another candle does not lose its original light. The Son, abiding in inseparable unity with His Parent, perpetually gravitates toward Him. The Holy Spirit, ever proceeding from the unknowable essence of the Father, abides upon the Son and experiences the depth of the Father. Thus the eternal movement of Divine Love reigns beyond the bounds of time, the wondrous glory being relayed from one Person to the next. And it is participation in this glory and love to which all rational beings are called.

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<sup>64</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, Paschal Homily 45

## THE LORD'S DESIGN FOR CREATION

How did our world come to be? Why did He Who needs nothing create everything? Our Church knows that the reason for the existence of the universe is the overabundance of Divine Love: "Since, then, God, Who is good and more than good, did not find satisfaction in self-contemplation, but in His exceeding goodness wished certain things to come into existence which would enjoy His benefits and share in His goodness, He brought all things out of nothing into being and created them, both what is invisible and what is visible. Yea, even man, who is a compound of the visible and the invisible. And it is by thought that He creates, and thought is the basis of the work, the Word filling it and the Spirit perfecting it."<sup>65</sup>

The Church particularly emphasizes God's complete freedom in the work of creation. *God ... [is not] worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things* (Acts 17:24–25). The power of God is not diminished by creating.

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Saint Benedict once saw God surrounded by countless rays, and our entire universe was contained in a single one of those rays.

Nor did God have any inner need to create the world, for God is not alone in His inner life: He is a Trinity. His love is entirely fulfilled within the Divinity. It is for this reason that we teach that the world exists due to His free desire to share bliss with newly-created beings, and not due to any conditions either external (which did not exist before the world began) or internal.

Even before the world was created, Almighty God conceived a plan for the universe and for each of its inhabitants. As Saint Gregory the Theologian says, "the World-generating Reason also considered, in His mind's great representations, the images of the world formed by Him, this world which was generated later, but which for God was present even then. Everything is before God's eyes: what will be, what was, and what is now. For me such a division is set by time: that one thing is ahead, another thing behind. But for God all merges into one, and all is held in the arms of the Great Deity. The Reason begat all things within Itself, and the outward begetting subsequently took place in a timely manner, when it revealed the great Word."<sup>66</sup>

In God the Son, God the Father appointed a place for every person who is saved. He resolved beforehand to adopt Christians to sonship through Jesus Christ, so that His grace might abide in us. After the fullness of time

<sup>65</sup> St. John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II. 2.

<sup>66</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, Poem 5: *On the World*.



had been arranged He foreordained that all things earthly and heavenly be united beneath a Head, which is Christ (Eph. 1:3–10), so that all rational beings might enter into the blessed life of the Trinity.

To accomplish this great design God determined the seasons and the times, that in this temporal world, as in a school for souls, He might teach free beings through love to know the Unoriginate Life.

## THE CREATION OF THE ANGELIC WORLD

In the very beginning of creation God created the invisible world out of nothing. In the deep silence of the first moment of time, through the Son the Father created countless choirs of blessed spirits, and by the Holy Spirit imparted to them the ability to stand fast in good.

“Even as a sunbeam, traveling through rain-heavy, calm air, encountering clouds in its refracted, revolving movements, produces the many-coloured rainbow curve, everywhere around, the upper air gleams brightly with many circles dissolving towards the edges; such is the nature of lights also, the highest light always shining brightly upon minds which are lesser beams. There is One Who is the source of lights, a light inexpressible, eluding capture, fleeing the speed of a pursuing mind whenever it approaches, forever outstripping the minds of all, that we may be drawn by desires to a height which is ever new. The secondary lights after the Trinity, which possesses royal glory, are the luminous, invisible angels. They freely walk about the great Throne, for they are swiftly-moving intellects, flame and Divine spirits, speeding swiftly through the air. They are simple (not compound), spiritual, permeated with light, and do not have their origin in flesh, and do not take on flesh, but remain as they were created.”<sup>67</sup>

But the angels’ incorporeality is relative. They are spiritual compared to the world of matter, but not in comparison with God, Whose Wisdom permeates *all understanding, pure, and most subtil, spirits* (Wisdom 7:23). Their intelligence is tremendously great, but it is not omniscient. They are quicker than any movement, but not omnipresent. They are immortal, but by grace, not by nature. They are tremendously powerful, but not omnipotent. They do not know the future unless the Holy Spirit reveals this mystery to them. They know no physical boundaries; they freely pass through walls and everywhere fulfill the commands of the Lord. Having

<sup>67</sup> St. Gregory the Theologian, Poem 6: *On Rational Beings*.

free will they are not easily inclined to evil, for they are strengthened by the Spirit of God.

By His will some of the angels oversee earthly laws, while others govern stars, planets, nations, countries, cities, and churches. Still others oversee plants, animals, water, and fire. Finally, there are guardian angels of individual people. These have no creative powers, but are God's servants, and their chief work is to hymn the Creator, and it is from them that the Church has learned this practice.

By nature the angels differ from one another by greater or lesser proximity to the Divinity. Through the teaching of Saint Dyonisius the Areopagite, grounded in Holy Scripture, we know of nine types of angel. The closest to God is the first category of angels, who are closely linked to Him and directly behold His face. These are the six-winged Seraphim, the many-eyed Cherubim, and the fiery Thrones. The second category of angels receives its effulgence through the first. These are the Dominions, Virtues, and Powers. The third and last is the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels.

The *Synaxis of the Holy Angels* is celebrated **November 8/21**.

## THE REBELLION OF THE MORNING STAR

Among the highest of the angels one cherub was particularly distinguished in his beauty and might. This was the *Morning Star*, or *Lucifer* ("the light-bearer"). He was appointed by God to be the guardian angel of our planet earth.

Originally the Morning Star was loyal to the Creator, and we have this description of his glory: *Thou sealest up the sun, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee* (Ez. 28:12–15).

One day, however, the Morning Star gazed upon his beauty and grew proud. In his arrogance he said, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the*

*most High* (Is. 14:13–14). With these words Lucifer incited a rebellion in the heavens, and a third of the angels supported him. Thus *evil* first appeared in the world. It has no essence of its own, but arises when the free will of rational beings diverges from the will of the Lord. Hence, all evil is lethal, for it leads the evildoer astray from the Source of Life.

When the newly-created spiritual universe was in turmoil, the archangel Michael cried, “Who is like God? Who is equal to Him?” And the angels who remained loyal to the Creator, led by the archangel Michael, cast down the prideful Lucifer and all his angels, and they fell as lightning into hades (Lk. 10:18).

At that moment all the angels made their choice. Those loyal to the Creator became firm in good and can no longer sin; rather, they are constantly growing in their knowledge of God. Conversely, the apostate angels chose the path of evil for all time, and they depart ever further from the Creator into eternal darkness. God has prepared eternal torment for them in the fiery abyss, into which they will be cast on the Day of Judgment. Since that time the Morning Star has been called *Satan* (“opponent” or “enemy”), because he wars with men and angels, and also the *devil* (“slanderer,” “accuser”), for he continually accuses all men, wishing to destroy them along with him. The Word of God calls him exactly this: *He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it* (Jn. 8:44). In Russian his angels came to be called *besy*, meaning “terrifiers,” because they frighten people, wishing to make them worship themselves, or *demons* (“knowers”), because though they have knowledge they have lost love. These fallen spirits, cast down from the heavens, abide in the air and throughout the firmament (Eph. 2:2, 6:12). Their kingdom is there, and for this reason they call themselves “masters of the cosmos.” From there they deceive all men and teach them every kind of evil. Everyone who works sin belongs to them, and the pagans revere them as gods. The demons introduced into the world worship of creation instead of the Creator, as well as magic, astrology, and soothsaying; they invented all false religions that lead men away from God, and it is they who inseminate heresies and schisms. Sorcerers, “faith healers” (including those who are allegedly Orthodox), psychic adepts, seers, and other practitioners of the occult interact with them.

It should be remembered, however, that they can do nothing if God forbids them. Without His permission they have not power even over swine (Mt. 8:28–34). Hence, we should not fear them, but rather run to the Lord and drive them away by fasting and prayer (Mt. 17:21). To the demons who came to him in the forms of monsters and giants, attempting to frighten him, Saint



Anthony said: “Nothing could have so revealed your weakness as appearing in this form. If you had any power over me you would have killed me long ago. This merely reveals your impotence.”

Hence, Christians who participate in the Holy Mysteries and do not commit mortal sins remain free from the violence of the devil. Though the enemy attempts to seduce a person from the Lord’s paths to the very end of his life, humble-mindedness is able to raise him above all the wiles of the devil.

## THE SIX DAYS OF CREATION

In addition to the invisible world the Lord created the visible one, and whereas spirits are similar to the Lord the material world is far from Divine nature indeed. Yet God created even matter unto His glory.

The creation of the universe lasted six days. This is not of course because God could not have created it in an instant, for every creative act of His had no duration. The moment the word of creation sounded, it immediately came to be. After creating the world in a week the Lord appointed a specific hierarchical structure and thereby indicated the sacraments of salvation.

For two thousand years all Orthodox have understood the history of creation literally, as described in the book of Genesis. Here is what Saint Ephraim the Syrian says: “No one should think that the six-day creation is an allegory. It is likewise impermissible to suggest that what is described as having been created in the course of six days was created in a single instant, or that this description contains mere words that either have no meaning or that mean something else.”<sup>68</sup> Saint Basil the Great adds that each day of creation lasted for 24 hours. The same was taught by all the great holy fathers of the Church: John Chrysostom, Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory the Theologian, and many others.<sup>69</sup> For them the very order of creation was an indication of the salvation to come: the Lord died on the sixth day, when man was created; He rested in the tomb on the seventh day; and He rose on the first day of the week, the day the world was created.

The holy martyr Justin the Philosopher writes this: “On the day of the sun we all assemble together because this is the first day, when God, Who changed darkness and matter, created the world, and Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from the dead on the same day.”<sup>70</sup> Saint Ireneus of Lyons adds, “In restoring this day to Himself the Lord went to suffer on the day that is the eve of the Sabbath, i.e., on the sixth day of creation, on which man also was created, through His suffering granting him a new creation, i.e., (freedom) from death.”<sup>71</sup>

This teaching was always the only acceptable one for the Orthodox, for any other understanding of the Bible account is tantamount to a direct attack on the sacred text. In the late 19th century, however, a number of theologians, enamored of the triumphant procession of godless science and evo-

<sup>68</sup> Saint Ephraim the Syrian, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*.

<sup>69</sup> Saint Basil the Great, *Talks on the Hexaemeron*, 2

<sup>70</sup> Martyr Justin the Philosopher, *Apology I*, 67

<sup>71</sup> Saint Ireneus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, IV, 23, 2

lutionism, decided to change the Church's teaching to bring it into line with the facts of scientific mythology. They began to teach that a day of creation lasted millions of years, that death existed even before the fall into sin, that man was not created from dust, but descended from monkeys, and that evolution is a method of Divine creation. All these conceptions contradict the patristic rules for interpreting Scripture and distort the very fundamentals of Orthodoxy. For if death did not come into the world through man, Christ died in vain. He misdiagnosed us, and therefore He did not save us. If God could not create the world as He said in the book of Genesis, He is not true, not almighty, and not good.

Not without reason did the saints of the last two centuries reject all attempts to combine evolution and Christianity. They called evolution "mindless nonsense" (Saint John of Kronstadt), "bestial philosophy" (Saint Barsanuphius of Optina), and "a destructive, poisonous teaching" (Hieromartyr Vladimir of Kiev). They said likewise that a Christian ought not "to weave in secret their various beliefs in which they think to combine both spiritism and geological nonsense with Divine Revelation."<sup>72</sup> "We have lately been overrun by nihilists, natural scientists, darwinists ... what, do you think the Church would be silent, would not raise her voice, would not condemn and anathematize them, were there anything new in their teaching? On the contrary, a council would immediately be held, and all of them and their teachings would be given over to anathema. A new item would be added to the current rite of Orthodoxy: 'To Büchner, Feuerbach, Darwin, Renan, Kardec, and all their followers: anathema!' But there is no need of a special council, nor of any addendum. All their false teachings have long ago been anathematized."<sup>73</sup>

## SCIENCE AND RELIGION ON CREATION

One of the chief obstacles on the path of conversion to God today is the materialistic representation of the world's origin, which masquerades as the latest word in science. Science in turn claims to be the standard of absolute truth. In actuality the scientific method of analysis is by definition incapable of describing the origins of the laws of nature. Furthermore, the past, not being subject to experimentation, cannot be adequately described by science. All attempts to create a scientific picture of the world are in actuality the creation of a pseudo-scientific myth.

<sup>72</sup> Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*.

<sup>73</sup> Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Contemplation and Reflection*.



According to this myth the universe was caused by the explosion of a tiny dot several billion years ago, and this chaos of particles randomly produced the stars, planets, and galaxies. On one planet life happened to occur, which began developing through mutation (breakdown) and natural selection. The end result was that man descended from monkeys. This was all caused purely by chance, lacking either goal or direction. Even a cursory glance exposes the absurdity of this model. As Saint Theophan the Recluse rightly says, “All their imaginings are a house of cards: one breath, and it collapses. There is no need even to disprove them in their elements. One need only treat them as one treats dreams ... This is exactly the case of the theory of the world’s formation of shadowy blotches with their supports—the theory of spontaneous origin, the Darwinian origin of species and kinds, and his latter fantasies regarding the origin of man. All is as the mumbling of one asleep.”<sup>74</sup>

Even ordinary experience shows us that order does not arise spontaneously out of chaos. Rather, the opposite is true: any order tends to break down spontaneously, and rationally-directed efforts are needed to preserve it. The second law of thermodynamics bears this out, stating that in closed systems (of which, according to materialism, the universe is one) entropy constantly increases. Even if we examine an open system, rational intervention is needed to improve order. Otherwise the principle of the bull in the china shop comes into play. Hence, the existence of order testifies to the existence of the Great Intellect Who set the universe in order. And the unity of the laws of nature testifies that this Intellect is the only one there is.

Once the great physicist Isaac Newton was visited by an acquaintance who was an atheist, who noticed the former’s working model of the solar system.

“Who made such a masterful construction?” he asked in amazement.

“Oh, it just happened,” Newton replied.

“That’s impossible!” the atheist exclaimed.

“Why? That’s exactly what you say about the original from which this was copied,” replied the renowned physicist.

Still more obvious is the action of the Creator in the creation of life. That “life comes from life” was demonstrated by the great biologist Louis Pasteur. The astounding complexity of a living cell, let alone every organism, is simply beyond comprehension. It took several thousand scientists decades to decode the human genome using the most powerful equipment available. What kind of mind did it take to encode it?

<sup>74</sup> Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*.



Mathematics shows the absurdity of all attempts to explain the existence of life without God. The probability of the accidental occurrence of even the simplest existing bacterium known to man is one in  $10^{40,000}$ , the occurrence of a new protein — 1 in  $10^{276}$ , and that of a human body—1 in  $10^{24,000,000}$ . No amount of time would be sufficient for this to happen by accident. As renowned physicist Fred Hoyle put it, “it would be more likely for a hurricane going through a junk yard to put together a Boeing than for a single living cell to occur.”<sup>75</sup>

All the more unthinkable are any attempts to produce reason from a conglomerate of irrational impulses. No mutations can ever produce reason from irrationality. If a person does wish to follow this teaching, should we pay any attention to a person who claims he is nothing but a biorobot? The American linguist Noam Chomsky demonstrated that our speech occurs prefabricated, and is not even the product of the brain.

It should be noted that all evidence presented in favor of the universe being many billions of years old is based on a series of errors. The first is that it is unverifiable by definition. We cannot go back in time, after all, and we have no witnesses to tell us what existed before man. All that remains is in the realm of the imagination. The second is the assumption of constancy (uniformism), which posits that all processes in the universe occur at approximately the same speed; hence, we can use contemporary processes to date the past. Such is hardly the case, however. Mankind’s memory, the earth’s strata, and the vastness of the cosmos tell of tremendous past catastrophes that have “reset the clock.” Furthermore, even now the processes that are considered models of permanency (e.g., radioactive decay) indicate otherwise. For example, in 1980 the Saint Helens volcano erupted. In 1998 the lava it produced was analyzed, and the lava formations were dated at between 100,000 and 1,000,000 years old.

If we take an unbiased look at what the earth’s strata tell us, we will see that they confirm the Bible: the petrified remains of dinosaurs (dragons), raindrops, and jellyfish describe a great planet-wide aquatic catastrophe that produced sedimentary rock in an extremely short period of time. Holy Scripture describes this as Noah’s flood. Conversely, no transitional links between various types of animal have ever been found within the earth’s strata, nor have any animal ancestors of man been discovered. Here we find confirmation of the Orthodox teaching of the instantaneous creation of complete life forms. The supposed transitional life forms shown in textbooks are either fabrications (pithecanthropus), or composite forms that lead to nowhere

<sup>75</sup> Paraphrased from the actual quote, which reads, “The chance that higher life forms might have emerged in this way is comparable with the chance that a tornado sweeping through a junk-yard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein.”—*Trans.*

(archaeopteris), or various types of creatures that lived at the same time, but in different places (equine evolution).

What is the reason for such widespread obviously irrational views of the world's origin? Saint Theophan the Recluse says this occurs because people "are carried away by the broad path of the passions: 'We don't want to know positive commandments,' they say; 'we need palpable natural laws.' And so they pursued them. What was the result? They cast their lot with irrational beasts. Is it not this moral collapse that also engendered the theory of man's origin from animals? See just how far they go! And so it goes, always fleeing from the Lord..."<sup>76</sup>

## THE FIRST DAY (Gen. 1:1–5)

In the beginning of time God created the invisible world and the earth from nothing. The newly-created earth was yet without form, void (i.e., empty), and covered with an abyss of waters. Darkness covered the primordial ocean. The Spirit of God soared like a bird over the waters, filling them with life and giving them the ability to later cleanse people in Holy Baptism.

And God said, *Let there be light*. And immediately light appeared: the Word spoken by God became law for the newly-created universe. This is not merely a fluctuation in the air, but the living decree of the Creator, forming all creation. This is the word that draws all to Christ, by Whom and for Whom all was created.

The primordial light was not yet contained in celestial bodies; rather, according to Saint Basil the Great, it ebbed, flowed, and disappeared, thereby marking the rhythm of day and night. Saint Ephraim the Syrian said that the primeval light was like a rainbow or the pillar of fire that guided the Hebrews in the wilderness.

God separated the light and the darkness. The light He called day, and the darkness—night. God gives names to the daily cycle, showing His pre-eminent power over time. The Lord, and not the sun, is the Cause of the daily rhythm of time.

*And the evening and the morning were the first day* (Gen. 1:5), says the book of Genesis. The evening is named first, for the Divine light set boundaries for itself in creating the heavens. The newly-revealed darkness became the beginning of the first night, and the newly-created material light became the beginning of the day.

<sup>76</sup> Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Thoughts for Each Day of the Year*.

The first day is so called because it is the model for all the days that follow thereafter. This first day of the universe, according to the teaching of the fathers of the Church, was a Sunday in the first month of spring. That God made this particular day the first in the history of the world is no accident. He knew that five and a half thousand years later, on this same spring Sunday, He would renew all creation by rising from the dead and manifesting to mankind the brilliance of eternal life. To this day on the night of Pascha we recall those first days of creation. It is no accident, as Saint Basil says, that this day symbolized that remarkable state that will come to be after the end of the universe. Then there will be eternal day for the blessed, and for the damned—eternal night.

## THE SECOND DAY (Gen. 1:6–8)

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On Monday God said, *Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.* And it was so. God created a firmament or space that divided the waters. And the Creator called this space heaven, showing that He alone has dominion over the heavens. Some of the waters remained beneath heaven. These are the waters that we use on a daily basis. Other waters abide beyond the bounds of the outer space that was created on the second day. These were poured out upon the earth on the day of the flood, and at the end of time these waters will fall upon the perishing world like hail weighing one talent (Rev. 16:21). And God saw that this was good and beautiful. *And the evening and the morning were the second day* (Gen. 1:8).

## THE THIRD DAY (Gen. 1:9–13)

On Tuesday God commanded the waters beneath the heavens to be gathered together. And it was so. In an instant the abyss of waters encompassing the earth was gathered into its places, and the dry land appeared. *And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas* (Gen. 1:10). According to Saint Basil the Great, the waters acquired the properties they have now, and the waters in the seas and in the oceans immediately became salty.

At dawn God commanded the earth to bring forth grass that produces seed according to its kind, and trees that produce fruits according to their

kind. And it was so. In an instant, out of the earth grew grass and trees laden with fruit, ready to feed the animals created two days later. Each of the plants exists to this day in the form in which it was originally created.

God's word abides in the earth to this day, commanding plants to grow on the earth. For His word is not an empty sound that dissipates in the air, but the living plan of the Creator Who formed the world.

*And the evening and the morning were the third day* (Gen. 1:13).

## THE FOURTH DAY (Gen. 1:18–22)

Wednesday arrived. And at dawn God said, *Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs* (celestial points of reference), *and for seasons, and for days, and years.*

And God created the lights: a larger light to rule the day, a lesser light to rule the night, and the stars. The primordial light was gathered into the sun and the stars as into vessels. And God gave them their places in the expanse of heaven, that they might shine above the earth. And in the blink of an eye the heaven was lit up and the stars took their posts, so that the light of each instantly reached the earth.

All the luminaries were subject to the Creator and created in order to serve man. Hence, in keeping with Scripture (Is. 47:13–14), the Church rejects all forms of astrology, knowing it to be a dark, demonic art, an abomination to God, lacking any natural basis.

*And the evening and the morning were the fourth day* (Gen. 1:10).

## THE FIFTH DAY (Gen. 1:20–23)

And God said, *Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*

And God created monsters in the depths of the seas—whales, aquatic dinosaurs, and sharks, that they might frolic in the oceans in His sight. From His life-creating hand went forth all the fishes, each according to its kind. In the air birds began to fly, each according to its kind.

All these creatures have something principally new compared to the creatures created before them: a living soul, created by God from the material world. This soul gives animals the ability to feel and to move, but as it is created of matter that can be perceived by the senses it is mortal.

And God saw the fishes, monsters, and birds He had created, that they were good. And the Creator blessed them, and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. “Let the waters in the seas swarm with fishes, and let the birds be multiplied on earth,” He commanded, and it was so. His word is fulfilled to this day by schools of fish as they go to spawn, and birds weave their nests on earth, singing songs of praise to God.

*And the evening and the morning were the fifth day* (Gen. 1:23).

## THE SIXTH DAY (Gen. 1:24–31)

Friday came. God commanded the earth to bring forth living creatures by the power of His word: cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kind. And immediately His word became deed, and to this day it remains a law for creation.

180 | In an instant from the bowels of the earth there issued forth completely formed animals, each just as it is today. One must be aware that the word kind means more than the biological term species. The beasts originally created possessed a tremendous capacity for variability, through which in various locales they could change their properties within the context of the original kind. But a rat will never turn into a monkey, nor a fish into a frog, nor a monkey into a man. The originally-embedded information is not capable of increasing—only of decreasing. God’s word resounds to this day in every creation, and leads each creature to the purpose for which God created it.

The Creator saw that each of the animals created was good, and blessed them: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. To all the beasts and birds and creeping things I give every green herb for meat.” In the primordial world there were no predators, no struggle for survival, no corruption; all animals received the gift of multiplying, limited to the confines of the earth.

## THE CREATION OF MAN (Gen. 1:26 – 2:7)

“When God has arranged all things and given everything its fitting order and beauty; when He has prepared a rich meal full of various foods and manifesting abundance and richness in all things; when, as it were, He has resplendently adorned the royal bridal chamber from top to bottom, it is then

that He finally creates him who is to enjoy all this, and gives him authority over all visible things, and shows how many times over this living creature that is to be created surpasses all created things, when He commands all creatures to be under his authority and direction.”<sup>77</sup>

Before creating man, in the depths of the heavens the Persons of the Holy Trinity mystically hold council: *Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth* (Gen. 1:26).

And God created man after His own image, dividing the single nature into the masculine and feminine genders, which the animals also possess. Their creation took place as follows: from untilled virgin soil that had never been irrigated with rain the Lord took the finest dust, and from it created a body, and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life. Thus the first-created man became a living soul, encompassing all the lives of the created world, and a participant in the radiance of God. The life of minerals occurs through participation in the existence and the physical composition of the primary elements common to all the universe. The life of plants is manifested in their capacity for growth and their ability to multiply and bear fruit. The life of the beasts is manifested in their mobility and ability to learn about the world through the senses. The life of the angels is manifested in reason and free will. But the greatest of the gifts of life is participation in the incorruptible power of the Divinity, which God gave to man and through submitting to which man is to become a god by grace. God gave him the name Adam (“red earth” or “likeness”), and if a person is faithful to the Creator he will become His likeness, while if he departs from Him he will go into the earth.

The original grace so illumined Adam that, according to Saint Seraphim, he “was immune to the action of the elements to such a degree that water could not drown him, fire could not burn him, the earth could not swallow him into its abysses, and the air could not harm him by any kind of action whatever. Everything was subject to him as the beloved of God, as the king and lord of creation, and everything looked up to him, as the perfect crown of God’s creatures, surpassing every creature of God upon the earth, and in the waters, and in the air ... Adam was made so wise by this breath of life which was breathed into his face from the creative lips of God, the Creator and Ruler of all, that there never has been a man on earth more wise or intelligent than he ... Adam could see and understand the Lord walking in paradise, and comprehend His words, and the conversation of the holy Angels, and the language of all beasts, birds, and reptiles and all that is now

<sup>77</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, Talks on the Book of Genesis, 7, 6







hidden from us fallen and sinful creatures, but was so clear to Adam before his fall.”<sup>78</sup>

The Lord blessed man and said, *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat* (Gen. 1:28–29).

The first-created man emerged from the hands of the Creator beautiful and a participant in Eternal life. As Saint John of Damascus writes, “God then made man without evil, upright, virtuous, free from pain and care, glorified with every virtue, adorned with all that is good, like a sort of second microcosm within the great world, another angel capable of worship, compound, surveying the visible creation and initiated into the mysteries of the realm of thought, king over the things of earth, but subject to a higher king, of the earth and of the heaven, temporal and eternal, belonging to the realm of sight and to the realm of thought, midway between greatness and lowliness, spirit and flesh: for he is spirit by grace, but flesh by overweening pride: spirit that he may abide and glorify his Benefactor, and flesh that he may suffer, and suffering may be admonished and disciplined when he prides himself in his greatness: here, that is, in the present life, his life is ordered as an animal’s, but elsewhere, that is, in the age to come, he is changed and—to complete the mystery—becomes deified by merely inclining himself towards God; becoming deified, in the way of participating in the divine glory and not in that of a change into the divine being.”<sup>79</sup>

## THE NATURE OF MAN

Here we must pause to examine the Orthodox teaching regarding man. The very name *man* used in Scripture—in Hebrew, Adam (both the personal name of the first man and the name of the whole race of men)—on the one hand means “one who likens himself” to God, thereby in a single word indicating the purpose of a person’s life, and, on the other hand, “red (i.e., bloody) earth”—that which one who rejects this higher purpose may become. Thus, the very name of our nature indicates its variability. And no wonder, for that which is created is by virtue of that fact susceptible to change. But man is

<sup>78</sup> *On the Goal of Christian Life: Conversation of Saint Seraphim of Sarov with N.A. Motovilov.*

<sup>79</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book II, 12:26

more capable of change than any other being, because he is by definition a complex creature. Christians know that man's single nature consists of a *body* created of dust and a *soul* breathed into him by the Divine breath.

The holy Orthodox Church teaches: "The *soul* ... is a living essence (Gen. 2:7), simple [not compound], incorporeal (Gen. 6:17), invisible in its proper nature to bodily eyes, immortal (Mt. 10:23), reasoning (1 Cor. 2:11) and intelligent, formless, making use of a body equipped with sensory organs, and being the source of its powers of life (Ps. 103:29, Lk. 8:55), and growth, and sensation, and generation, the *mind* (Ps. 138:14) being but its purest part and not in any wise alien to it (for as the eye to the body, so is the mind to the soul); further it enjoys freedom and volition (2 Sam. 3:21) and energy, and is mutable, that is, it is given to change, because it is created. All these qualities according to nature it has received of the grace of the Creator (Job 12:10), of which grace it has received both its being and this particular kind of nature."<sup>80</sup>

Thus, Blessed Theophylact, in commenting on the apostle's words: *the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess. 5:23), writes thus: "The Spirit, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit Whom we receive through baptism. If we keep His lamp bright and unextinguishable we will enter into the bridal chamber of the Bridegroom: both soul and body will then be blameless, if the spirit within us shines. Gregory of Nyssa says that since a person consists of every kind of soul, physical, sensual, and rational, the apostle used the word *spirit* to refer to the rational part, *soul*—to the sensual part, and *body*—to refer to the physical life within us. Thus, he is praying that all of them might be preserved blameless in all things, and in all things be well-pleasing to God."<sup>81</sup> These words of the leader of the apostles are understood similarly: *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Heb. 4:12). Blessed Theophylact understands the word *spirit* to mean either the grace of the Holy Spirit, of which those who are punished are first deprived, or that the Word of God likewise permeates incorporeal beings.

The use of the plural suggests that many lives, not one, have been breathed into man. "For man," as Saint Philaret of Moscow rightly notes, "truly conjoins within himself the life of the plants, of animals, and of angels, life temporal and eternal, life in the image of the world and life in the image

<sup>80</sup> Saint John of Damascus, An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book II, 12:26.

<sup>81</sup> Blessed Theophylact of Bulgaria, Explanation of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians.

of God.”<sup>82</sup> Saint John of Damascus reveals to us in greater detail how this whole marvelous bouquet of lives is manifested. He writes: “Man, it is to be noted, has community with things inanimate, and participates in the life of unreasoning creatures, and shares in the mental processes of those endowed with reason. For the bond of union between man and inanimate things is the body and its composition out of the four elements [we would say that they share the same chemical makeup, since man’s body consists of the same atoms—*Auth.*]: and the bond between man and plants consists, in addition to these things, of their powers of nourishment and growth and seeding, that is, generation: and finally, over and above these links man is connected with unreasoning animals by appetite, that is anger and desire, and sense and impulsive movement ... man’s reason unites him to incorporeal and intelligent natures, for he applies his reason and mind and judgment to everything, and pursues after virtues, and eagerly follows after piety, which is the crown of the virtues. And so man is a microcosm.”<sup>83</sup>

## THE SEVENTH DAY (Gen. 2:1–3)

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And God looked over all His creation at sunset on Friday, and saw that all He had created was exceedingly good. Nowhere was there death, or want, or corruption; all things perfectly reflected the Creator’s intent. Then the Lord blessed all things, and on the following day He rested from all His works. This day He called “rest” (in Hebrew, *shabbāth*), Saturday, and sanctified it, as a reminder of His creative might.

Since that time God has created nothing new in the material world, but to this day His omnipotent power upholds the universe, and His hands rule all that exists therein. The living words instilled in the world during the six days of creation to this day resound in the world and draw all creatures toward their intended purpose. The Creator reigns over both human history and the angelic worlds. Whereas in this irrational world all things heed Him unquestioningly, rational beings are each assigned their respective tasks, and if one does not perform it another will be found who will perform the Lord’s will. His will is performed even when men and angels rebel against Him, for He aids all that is good, cutting off evil and causing it to result in good. It is for this reason that God is called “the Almighty.”

<sup>82</sup> Saint Philaret of Moscow, *Notes Toward a Sound Understanding of the Book of Genesis*, 1

<sup>83</sup> Saint John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, II, 12:26.



## PARADISE (Gen. 2:8–17)

Having created man from dust, God prepared a wondrous palace for him as king of the world. In the east, in the land of Eden, the Creator caused a beautiful garden to grow, called Paradise, in which grew every possible kind of marvelous plant, and wondrous incorrupt flowers gave off a delicate fragrance. From Paradise flowed a stream that divided into four rivers: the Nile, the Ganges, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. The shores of the stream were adorned with gold and precious stones. In the middle of Paradise lay a wondrous sanctuary. There two trees grew: the tree of life, of which one who ate could never die, communing of the Lord's grace, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God led the newly-created man into Paradise so that he might tend it and protect it from evil. The Lord gave Adam the commandment to abstain from the fruits of the tree of knowledge: *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die* (Gen. 2:16–17).

God forbade eating from the tree of knowledge, firstly because He desired that man be obedient to Him, thereby showing his love, and secondly because He did not wish for man to know evil. The word *know* means not

only to obtain specific information, but rather to come to know something by uniting with it (as the Russian saying goes, “you don’t know a man until you’ve eaten a sack of salt with him”). If man decided to eat of the forbidden fruit, he would thereby reject God’s measure of good and evil and would begin to decide for himself what was good and what was bad. Thus he would separate himself from God, the Source of Life, declaring himself a false god of sorts, and as a result he would die.

The fathers of the Church understand Paradise not merely as a wonderful place where man physically lived, but also as a particular state of the soul when it beheld the Divine words instilled in every creation and, in contemplating them, ascended to the Creator. The only thing forbidden was any attempt at “forced entry” into God’s essence, this being symbolized by the tree of knowledge. For no created being is able to know God’s essence. Otherwise it would perish from the overabundance of light. Unfortunately, however, Adam violated the will of the Creator and, unconfirmed in good, desired to become a god without God. But this was yet to come.

## THE CREATION OF WOMAN (Gen. 2:18–25)

**A**t the Lord’s command all the beasts and the birds entered into Paradise, and Adam gave to each a name expressing God’s will for that particular creature. Thus the first man entered into his reign over the earth, as the Creator had promised him. But Adam was alone in Paradise, and then God said, *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him* (Gen. 2:18).

Among all the animals none was found like unto the man. Thus the Lord showed that man is essentially different from the animals, and preemptively disproved the mindless teaching of the pagans alleging that people are related to various animals. According to God’s teaching the beasts are not our “lesser brethren,” as the pagans say, but our servants, for whom men must care and who serve men.

Then God brought a particular state upon the man, similar to a deep sleep, but without loss of consciousness. The Lord took one of Adam’s ribs, and from it created a wife for him. A rib was taken so that the man might love God with heartfelt love. Thus all mankind came forth from a single root.

Adam said, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave*

*his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh* (Gen. 2:23–24).

Thus in Paradise there appeared marriage, blessed by the Creator. However, as the eastern fathers of the Church teach, the means by which people could reproduce in Paradise differed fundamentally from that of today. The current form of conjugal union has in it the fruits of the fall into sin; hence, reproduction likewise has come to resemble that of the animals.

The first people created by God abode in eternal glory and had no need of clothing, for the light of the Lord illumined them. They were to have rejected temptation and risen to the heights of godlikeness, but such was not to be.

## THE FALL INTO SIN (Gen. 3)

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**T**he fallen first among the angels, the Morning Star, not content with having destroyed a third of the angels along with him, seized upon the thought of destroying the newly-created people as well. For this purpose he entered the serpent and crawled into Paradise.

There he found the woman, standing not far from the tree of knowledge. And the serpent, wishing to make her doubt the justice of the Creator, said to the woman, *Is it true that God has forbidden you to eat of all the trees in Paradise?*

Here our foremother made several tragic mistakes. Firstly, she decided on her own to enter into conversation with the devil without consulting her husband. Thus she became the first feminist, destroying the hierarchy established by God.

Secondly, conversing with evil is by definition absolutely impermissible. Merely conversing with the impure spirit already defiles a person. The enemy has decisively chosen rebellion against God, and attempting to change his mind merely pulls one deeper into the web of iniquity.

Thus, the first woman decided to converse with Satan herself. She said, *We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die* (Gen. 3:2–3).

Thus the woman made her third mistake: she added her own words to the Lord's, which is a great sin. She substituted mere magic for the commandment of obedience.

Then the serpent proceeded to directly slander the Creator, accusing Him of envying men: *Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil* (Gen. 3:4–5).

Then our foremother turned her curious gaze toward the tree, and saw that it was good for food (thus the lust of the flesh appeared in her), pleasant to the eyes (the lust of the eyes), and to be desired because it gives knowledge (the pride of life). Then she took a fruit from the tree and ate it. And wanting to make her husband an accomplice to her crime, she gave him the fruit as well. Adam ate it, not wishing to prefer God over his wife. And as the devil had told them, their eyes were opened. But they did not become gods; rather, they saw that they were naked, and so they made themselves aprons of fig leaves.

God was not slow in coming to search for man. But the first people hid from the Omnipresent Lord in the bushes.

Then God said, “Adam, where are you?”

Adam decided to deceive the Lord:

“I heard Your voice and hid, because I was naked.”

“Who told you that you are naked?” God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree from which I forbade you to eat?”

But instead of repenting Adam decided to blame everything on his wife and on the Lord Himself:

“The woman whom You gave me, she gave to me of the tree, and I ate.”

The woman also denied her guilt, and said the serpent had deceived her (Gen. 3:8–13).

Then God, seeing man’s incorrigibility, passed sentence upon the sinners. The serpent was told that he was accursed among the beasts of the field, and would crawl on his belly and eat earth. In addition, between him and the seed of the woman there would be enmity, which would end in that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head, and that the serpent would sting his heel. These words are called the *Protoevangelium* (“Gospel prototype”), because they foretell the victory of Christ, born of a Woman without participation of a man, over the devil, though the latter would cause His death by stinging His heel (the flesh).

The woman was punished by afflictions during pregnancy, the pangs of labor, and subjection to her husband. As a sign of this authority Adam named her, as he had previously named the animals, giving her the name Eve, meaning “life,” because she is the mother of all that live.

Adam was told that the earth was cursed for his sin: his work would always be difficult, and the earth would bring forth thorns and weeds for him. And he would return into the earth from which he was taken, for dust he was and unto dust would he return.



This is why man dies: this occurs in fulfillment of these words of the Lord. The human body decays in the earth, becoming earth, while the soul descends beneath the earth—into the valley of the shadow of death.

After this God made the first people clothing of skins and clothed them, and taught them to offer sacrifice as a symbol of the future Sacrifice of Christ. Furthermore, the Lord made man's body coarser, rendering him incapable of seeing the spirit world under ordinary circumstances.

Then God said, "Behold, Adam has become like one of us, deciding for himself what is good and what is evil for him. We must see that he not take of the fruits of the tree of life and live forever." For eternity without the Creator is hell on earth. And God sent Adam and Eve out of Paradise, that they might till the earth from which they were taken. Around Paradise a fiery sword began to circle, and the cherubim stood guard to bar to man the path to immortal life.

## ORIGINAL SIN

When the first people committed the first sin, their nature itself was subjected to change. Whereas before man's mind had contemplated God, the will and the feelings being submissive to the mind and the body subject to the soul, now this hierarchy collapsed. The mind began reflecting the will and the feelings, and as a result was filled with a multitude of thoughts. Instead of contemplating Divine truth the mind created an entire world of imaginings, called fantasies. The will weakened and began to vacillate between various imaginary good things, not knowing truth from falsehood. The feelings began to strive for imaginary pleasures that bring real sorrow. The flesh escaped the soul's control and began setting its own conditions. As a result its very existence became unbalanced, and it became subject to sickness and death. Worst of all, man lost the grace of the Holy Spirit that had abode within him. In his heart a yawning emptiness arose, which ever since has given man an insatiable drive for happiness. Man died to God, and since that time all men have been born in a state of spiritual death.

The devil who seduced man seized power over him, and his secret power entered the depths of the human soul. Moreover, man began to consider the devil's actions his own. Thus was born the diabolical *co-operation* that produces the law of sin. Sin, like a sort of spiritual power, became the controller of man's life. The three chief lusts that entered Eve by the forbidden tree (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life) became the basis for man's actions. However, man has retained the ability to distin-

guish between good and evil, and the memory of God embedded in his heart. He can do good deeds, but cannot free himself completely from the violence of the devil.

Every person receives this state at the moment of his conception, as King David says concerning this (Ps. 50:7). The river of human nature was poisoned at its source, hence the need for the intervention of the Creator Himself, Who could remake His creation. Without His enlivening power no one could, can, or will be able to break free of the whirlpool of death and evil into which we were flung by our first-parents. It is not that we are somehow personally responsible for another's sin, but rather that the dark power of the devil enters us and makes us sinners, and hence subjects us to the wrath of God.

God immediately began to treat sin, but sin continued to increase, drawing its power from human nature. Thus, the more greatly a person sinned, the weaker he became. Were it not for the Lord's intervention, the whole universe would have been destroyed by the hurricane of evil.

## CAIN AND ABEL (Gen. 4)

Adam and Eve had children. The first was a son, whom they named Cain ("aquisition"), because they thought that he was the seed that would save them. The second was Abel ("vapor, breath"), a child of repentance, so named because the first people had seen the groundlessness of their hopes for a successful life upon the earth.

Cain was a tiller of the soil, and Abel was a shepherd. New Year's Day arrived (in ancient times it was celebrated on the first day of spring), and they brought sacrifices to the Creator. Cain sacrificed what was closest to hand, while Abel sacrificed the best that he had. And God accepted Abel's sacrifice, but rejected that of Cain. Cain envied Abel, for his heart was impure. Then the Lord said to him, *Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him* (Gen. 4:6–7).

But envy prevailed, and a few days later Cain killed Abel in the field (according to tradition it was the 14th day of Nisan—the same day when the Lord later suffered).

Then God said to him, "Where is Abel, your brother?"

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain answered insolently.

“The voice of your brother cries out to Me from the earth. It will bear no fruit for you from henceforth. You will groan and quake on the earth,” God said to him.

Even now Cain did not repent, but merely expressed his indignation at God’s “injustice”:

“My punishment is more than I can bear. You will drive me off the earth and I will hide from Your face, and anyone who meets me will kill me.”

But God placed a mark upon Cain so that no one would kill him. And Cain departed from the face of God and built a city that he named after his son. The descendants of Cain created a civilization without the Lord. Their credo was love for self to the point of hatred for God. One of Cain’s descendants invented polygamy (Lamech), another—animal husbandry (Jabal), a third—music (Jubal), a fourth—metallurgy (Tubalcain), and a fifth (his daughter Naamah)—prostitution. All of them were later deified by the pagans.

Christians know that Abel was the most ancient prefiguration of Christ. His sacrifice is an image of the Eucharist, the well-pleasing sacrifice offered for the living and the dead. Abel was killed by his brother on the same day when the Lord was crucified. The blood of Abel cries out to God to be avenged, and the Blood of Christ cries out to the Father for the forgiveness of those who have believed and the punishment of those who have rejected Him.

## THE CHURCH BEFORE THE FLOOD (Gen. 5)

After the death of Abel Adam and Eve had a third son, Seth, from whom we all were born, followed by other children. The descendants of Seth were faithful to God. At the birth of Seth’s son Enoch, common worship was established upon the earth. People began to call upon the name of the Lord together.

The first people, not yet decayed by the venom of sin, lived many hundreds of years. In this way the original paradisiacal Revelation was passed down to the times of Abraham undistorted, and from him to Moses. Many pagan nations have legends concerning this.

However, contrary to God’s will, the descendants of Seth (who at that time were called “sons of God”) fell into unbridled fornication. One of Seth’s descendants, Enoch, attempted to call his relations to repentance, but his preaching fell on deaf ears. God rewarded the righteous man, however, taking him up alive into Heaven, so that he has not seen death to this day. He

will return to earth only at the very end, to warn men of God's great final punishment: the flood of fire.

After Enoch's disappearance people continued to work iniquity. They lived in depravity, worked sorcery, invented narcotics, and angered God in every possible way. As a result of their iniquities they began to give birth to giants, noted for their cruelty and hideous appearance. Seeing their incorrigibility, the Lord said, "My Spirit will not be neglected forever by these people. I will give them 120 years for repentance."

But this reprieve did not result in men's correction. Seeing this, the Lord commanded the last righteous man, Noah, to begin construction of an enormous ship—the ark—for He had resolved to destroy all sinners from the earth.

For a hundred years Noah, along with his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, labored constructing the ark, proclaiming to all the coming flood and calling them to repentance. But everyone mocked him, thinking him insane.

## THE GREAT FLOOD (Gen. 6-9)

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And so the measure of evil was filled up. God proclaimed to Noah the approach of the Great Flood. 2262 years after the creation of the world, on the 20th day of the second month (April–May), Noah, his sons, and their wives entered the ark. Together with them entered one pair of each kind of land animal. Clean animals and birds (suitable for sacrificial offerings) entered in pairs of seven, and seven days later the flood came upon the earth. God closed the door of the ark behind Noah, and after this salvation for those who remained became impossible.

The windows of the heavens and the fountains of the abyss were opened. Walls of waters came crashing over the earth. For forty days a terrible rain continued, and for another 150 days the waters rose, so that the whole planet, even the highest mountains, was left underwater. Every breathing thing perished. Outside the ark no one survived. Multitudes of creatures of every kind perished, the remains of which are found by paleontologists. Many petrified remains may be seen to this day on the peaks of the highest mountains, and it was then that sedimentary rock strata were formed.

After this God showed His care for those who were in the ark. The windows of the heavens and the fountains of the abyss were closed, and the Lord sent a powerful wind upon the earth, which began to dry it. In September the ark came to rest on the Mountains of Ararat. On December 1 mountain peaks appeared, and after forty days Noah released a raven, to learn whether



the water had receded from the earth. But the raven returned to the ark, because there was no dry land. Then Noah sent a dove, but it too found no place for itself, and it returned to the ark. Another seven days later the righteous one again released a dove, and the dove returned toward evening, and in its beak there was an olive leaf. Thus Noah learned that the flood had ended. Exactly one year after the beginning of the flood God commanded Noah to go out of the ark. Thus began the resettling of the earth.

When Noah and his family and all the animals went out of the ark, he offered up a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God on a newly-erected altar. God

smelled the fragrance of his prayer and promised never again to bring a flood of water upon the earth, commanding the people who had been saved to re-settle the earth, to be fruitful and multiply. He permitted them to eat not only plants, but also meat, though He forbade them to consume blood. God promised to demand a reckoning for human blood from all animals and men, commanding that murder be punished by death, for it defiles the image of God. This command led to the creation of governments, whose purpose is to preserve mankind from slipping down into the antediluvian abyss of evil. Thus a covenant between God and men was established, and in witness to this covenant the Lord set a rainbow in the heavens.

### THE SIN OF HAM (Gen. 9:20–29)

After the Flood Noah and his sons began to till the earth. He planted a vineyard, and when the fruits were ripe he made wine. Not yet knowing the properties of the drink, he became drunk and lay naked in his tent. His middle son, Ham, saw him there. He left the tent and laughingly told his brothers outside about their father's condition. But Shem and Japheth acted nobly: they took a garment and, walking backward, entered the tent and covered the nakedness of their father without seeing it.

When Noah awoke and learned how Ham had laughed at him, he said, *Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren ... blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant* (Gen. 9:25–27).

Thus Ham was punished in the person of his son Canaan (the one who, according to tradition, told his father of Noah's act). Ham himself was not cursed, because Noah did not wish to curse one whom God had already blessed: *And God blessed Noah and his sons* (Gen. 9:1). The descendants of Canaan (the Palestinians and the Phoenicians) indeed throughout history have been in subjection to the descendants of Shem (the Hebrews) and Japheth (the Europeans).

The blessing of Noah was a great prophecy of the fates of the races. As the righteous one had foretold, the descendants of Shem were particularly religiously endowed. With them the Covenant was made, and, most importantly, from Shem himself the Savior descended according to the flesh.

The descendants of Japheth, as Noah had foretold, scattered throughout the world, and after the Divine Incarnation entered into the Covenant of Shem. The tents of Shem—the Old Testament Church—received the de-

scendants of Japheth, the pagans who accepted Christianity. Thus a single Church was formed, uniting all the nations.

After the flood Noah lived 350 years more and died, commanding all his descendants to preserve peace among themselves.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL AND THE SCATTERING OF THE NATIONS (Gen. 10–11)

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And so they did. Instead of stone they began to fire bricks, and instead of mortar they used tar. Thus, all mankind (instead of fulfilling God's command to settle the earth) grew proud of their supposed greatness and rebelled against the Creator: people said that if a new flood came they would take refuge upon the tower, not trusting God's promise not to punish the earth again with water.

Then the Lord decided to come down and look at the city and the tower that the people were building themselves. And God said to His Son, *Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech* (Gen. 11:6–7).

And so it happened. Men received new languages and ceased to understand each other. After this the Lord scattered them throughout the earth, Nimrod's empire collapsed, and men ceased building the city and the tower. The city came to be called Babylon, meaning "confusion," for there God confounded the languages of all the nations. Later this city became the capital of the pagan world and the personification of world evil (the ruins of the tower to this day stand not far off in what is now Iraq), this being a sign of God's wrath.

The descendants of Shem settled in the Near East. These are the Jews, the Arabs, the Persians, the inhabitants of East Turkey, the Dravidians in India, the Chinese, the Malays, and certain island dwellers.



The descendants of Japheth settled Europe, Central Asia, and America. These are the Slavs, the Norse, the Native Americans, the Celts, and many other nations.

The descendants of Ham settled Africa and certain of the Pacific Islands. His descendants are the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, the Berbers, and other Negro peoples.

All of these speak their own languages, and the restoration of man's original unity, destroyed at the pandemonium of Babel, occurred only on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the gift of speaking in different languages.

## THE RISE OF PAGANISM

Scattered across the face of the earth, the nations began to stray farther and farther from the true faith in God the Creator. Although traces of the original Revelation are preserved in nearly all nations to this day, it has been tainted by numerous superstitions, errors, and absurdities. The reasons for this terrible spiritual catastrophe are described by the apostle Paul (Rom. 1:18–32). Though men had knowledge of God both from Tradition and from contemplating the harmonious concord of creation, they did not wish to render Him fitting glory, and refused to give thanks to Him. All their thoughts were of the earth, and they remembered God only occasionally. As time goes by vanity seizes their thoughts; they have no time even to glance toward heaven, and think only of their earthly needs (after all, we have families to feed; we've no time for going to church—so say the pagans of today). As a result the mind begins to seek justification for its actions and poisons man's heart, so that it forgets how to heed the conscience, and instead heeds its lusts.

In order to muffle God's voice in their hearts, people began to invent other gods for themselves. At first they worshiped the natural elements—the sun, the moon, the stars, the winds, the stones, and the seas. Then they began to ascribe magical powers to beasts and plants, and finally they reached the ultimate evil: they began to worship *idols* depicting deified people, beasts, and monsters, and to believe that these were in fact God. Furthermore, mass worship began of the evil spirits who were orchestrating this process of moral collapse, giving rise once again to magic, sorcery, astrology, and the other black arts. The demons came to inhabit the idols and worked false miracles, so as to lead people as far away from the Creator as possible. Thus a large number of people became *pagans* or *idolaters*, whose religion consists of worshiping creation instead of the Creator. To this day billions of people on our planet adhere to this false faith. These are the Hindus, the shamans, the Buddhists, and many others.

## THE CALLING OF ABRAHAM

(Gen. 11:27–13:18)

The nations became ever more deeply enshrouded in the darkness of paganism. Only a few families preserved the light of the original Revelation. And then it pleased God to establish a separate people for Himself, in whom not only the original knowledge of Him would be handed down, but also the salvation of all mankind would be prepared.

One of the people who heard of the Creator was Abram, a descendant of Shem, who lived in the land of the Chaldees (today this constitutes Iraq and eastern Turkey). His forbear Eber was the only man who had refused to help build the Tower of Babel, but Abram's grandfather had already renounced the true faith and begun manufacturing idols. Nevertheless, the remembrance of the Creator still remained among Abram's generation, and after reflecting upon the world Abram came to the conclusion that neither idols nor the natural elements could be the true God, and hence they must not be worshiped. He resolved to worship only the Creator of the universe, and the Lord, seeing his faithfulness, appeared to him and said: *Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed* (Gen. 12:1–3).

And Abram arose and went out into the unknown, obedient to the command of God, though he was already 75 years old. He was accompanied by his nephew Lot. And Abram came into the land of Canaan and crossed it entirely, to a place called Sichem, where in the oak grove of Mamre God again appeared to him and promised to give this land to his descendants. In gratitude for this Abram offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and since that time this land was called "the promised land" (what is now Israel and Palestine).

After this there was a famine in Canaan, and Abram emigrated to Egypt. There a trial awaited him: Pharaoh took his wife Sarai for his own. But the Lord delivered them from mockery, and the king of Egypt dismissed them with gifts. After this they settled in southern Canaan, where they raised livestock.

Soon the flocks of Abram and Lot grew so great that there was not enough space for them to live together. Then Abram magnanimously invited Lot to choose where he would settle, though Lot was younger. Lot chose for himself the region of the river Jordan and settled in the city of Sodom. At that time the Dead Sea did not yet exist. The land was ir-

rigated by rivers, and it was beautiful, though its inhabitants were great sinners.

Abram settled in the city of Hebron, in the oak grove of Mamre. And the Lord again promised to give all that he saw to him and to his descendants for their domain, and to make his descendants as innumerable as the sand on the seashore. We Christians too are Abram's spiritual descendants, in whom this prophecy has been fulfilled. Abram built an altar in Hebron, near the oak, which grows there to this day.

## ABRAM FREES LOT AND IS BLESSED

BY MELCHIZEDEK (Gen. 14, Heb. 7)

At that time Sodom, where Lot had settled, fell under the sway of the kings of Sumer (Iraq). Soon the inhabitants of Sodom revolted, but the kings of Sumer and Elam (Iran) punished the rebels by invading and sacking Sodom, taking Lot prisoner.

When Abram learned of this he took his servants (of whom there were only three hundred eighteen) and set out in pursuit of the invading forces. At night he fell upon the forces of the kings, routed them, and pursued them to Damascus, freeing his nephew and his servants.

When he returned victorious he was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem, a priest of the Most High God, who brought out to him bread and wine. And Melchizedek blessed him: *Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand* (Gen. 14:19–20). Abram gave him a tenth part of his spoils, thereby acknowledging Melchizedek's superiority.

Scripture tells us nothing of Melchizedek's origins, nor of his death. His very name means "king of truth," while the word *Salem* means "peace." Thus, this mysterious figure prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ, Whose begetting by the Father is incomprehensible and Whose existence is eternal. He is the True King of truth and peace, for in His own Self He reconciled pagans and Jews, men and angels, and—most importantly—mankind to the Creator. Christ, like Melchizedek, is both King, having freed His creation from the hands of the tyrant Satan, and High Priest, having offered His own Self in sacrifice. To this day He performs His priestly service, bestowing upon us His Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine. Hence, Abram, being a prophet, both acknowledged Melchizedek's greatness and offered him a tithe, as an image of Christ the Savior, Who is called a Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

## THE COVENENT WITH ABRAHAM

(Gen. 15–17)

After all these occurrences God appeared to Abram in a vision at night: *Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward*, the Creator said to him (Gen. 15:1). Thus, for everyone who like Abram is faithful to God, the Lord Himself becomes a defense.

But Abram did not rejoice at the Lord's promise, because he had no children, and the steward of his house, Eleazar, was to be his heir. But the Lord tells Abram that his heir will nevertheless be his own son. God led the righteous man out of his tent and said to him, *Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be* (Gen. 15:5). And Abram believed God, and this was imputed to him for righteousness. For he was already a decrepit old man, yet his faith told him that all things are possible for the Creator. And indeed, countless righteous men who have adopted the faith of Abram shine as the stars in the heavens.

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Then, at the command of God, Abram slaughtered in sacrifice a cow, a goat, and a sheep, all three years old, as well as a turtledove and a young pigeon. He cut them in half and placed the halves opposite each other; only the birds he did not cut in half. And birds of prey descended upon them, but Abram drove them away. This sacrifice was a sign that an eternal covenant was concluded between God and Abraham.

Three year-old animals were sacrificed to symbolize the three generations that would live in exile in Egypt, and they were cut in half as a sign of the Hebrews' sufferings in captivity. The turtledove indicates the generation that emerged from slavery and lived in the wilderness, and the dove—the generation of the conquerors of Canaan. The birds of prey symbolized the evil spirits attacking the descendants of Abram and the foes directed by those spirits, who were driven away by the righteous man's prayer. And indeed, on many occasions God saved the Hebrews for the sake of the promise given to Abram.

At sunset Abram was in ecstasy, and terror and great darkness came upon him. Then God said, *Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites [the local inhabitants — Auth.] is not yet full* (Gen. 15:13–16).

And when darkness fell after sunset, smoke and flames of fire passed between the halved animals, as a sign that God was one with Abram, as the

bodies of the animals had been a single whole while they were alive. And the Lord made a covenant with Abram, promising to give to him all the land of Canaan. God's appearance at the setting of the sun symbolized the incarnation of the Only-begotten Son at the arrival of the end of time, for with Christ's coming the evening of the world arrived.

Despite God's promise, however, Abram's wife Sarai remained childless. Then she herself gave him her handmaid, Hagar the Egyptian. Hagar conceived and began to despise Sarai, and Sarai responded by persecuting her. The abused Hagar fled into the wilderness, where she was met by the Angel of the Lord, the eternal Messenger of God the Father, who commanded her to go back. He promised to multiply her descendents, and promised that the son born of her would be as a wild ass among men, warring against all, and that all would war with him.

Then Hagar exclaimed, *Thou God seest me ... Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?* (Gen. 16:13). She returned to Sarai, and as God had foretold she had a son, Ishmael, the forbear of many Arabian tribes. One of his descendants was Muhammad, in whom was fulfilled God's prophecy of the universal war that the Ishmaelites would wage against the spiritual children of Abram—the Christians.

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When Abram was 99 years old the Lord again appeared to him and said, *I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect* (Gen. 17:1). Abram fell down and worshiped God. Then God renewed the covenant with him and changed his name as a sign that his fate had changed: *Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram* ["father of height"], *but Abraham* ["father of a multitude"], *for a father of many nations have I made thee ... and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee* (Gen. 17:5–7).

As a sign of the covenant God commanded Abraham and all his household to circumcise their foreskin, which he immediately did. Each of his descendants had to be circumcised on the eighth day. Circumcision was a symbol of faith in the coming of the promised seed of Abraham, Christ. On the eternal eighth day of His Kingdom he will lead the faithful through spiritual circumcision—baptism. In baptism it is not a part of the body that is cut off, but the sin that has overgrown the soul.

In addition to changing Abram's name, God changes Sarai's, as well. Henceforth she is no longer Sarai ("my lady," i.e., of Abram alone), but Sarah ("the lady" of all the spiritual descendents of her husband). After this God promised that Abraham's heir would be Sarah's son Isaac ("laughter"), with whom He will conclude an eternal covenant. From Ishmael God promised to bring forth a great nation.

## GOD'S APPEARANCE TO ABRAHAM (Gen. 18)

Once, when Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day, he saw three strangers. Being a hospitable person, Abraham immediately ran to meet the travelers and, bowing down to the ground before them, began asking them to be his guests and take some refreshment.

The strangers entered the tent. Abraham himself washed their feet and ordered that the fatted calf be slaughtered and a meal prepared. While they were eating, one of them said to him: *I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life* [the same time next year—Auth.]; *and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son* (Gen. 18:10).

Sarah was standing in back at the entrance to the tent, and laughed inwardly, because she was very old (being then 89). But the Lord (for He it was) said, “Wherefore did Sarah laugh? Is there anything difficult for the Lord?”

Sarah was afraid, and began to deny it, saying no, she had not laughed, but God said, *Nay; but thou didst laugh* (Gen. 18:15).

And the Strangers arose and went toward Sodom. Abraham went to accompany them, and God said that He had come to judge the inhabitants of Sodom: *I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ... Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know* (Gen. 18:19–21).

Here we see that grave sins raise a cry of sorts in the spiritual world, calling down God's justice upon the iniquitous.

Abraham knew the impiety of the Sodomites, and wishing to save them from inevitable destruction he said, “Lord, will You really destroy the righteous with the sinner? What if there are only fifty righteous men in the city? Will the Judge of all the earth act unjustly?”

The Lord replied, “If I find fifty righteous men in the city I will spare this place.”

Abraham replied, “Behold, I have resolved to speak to the Master, I who am dust and ashes. Suppose there are five men too few to make up fifty righteous men?”

God replied, “I will not destroy it for the sake of forty-five.”

Abraham continued asking and implored God to spare the city for the sake of forty, and God promised. Thus, reducing the number, Abraham asked for clemency for the sake of thirty, twenty, and even ten righteous men. And the Lord promised to spare it for the sake of ten.

And the Lord went into Sodom, and Abraham returned to his home. Thus God revealed His nature to the righteous man, showing that He is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to Whom one glory and worship are due.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH (Gen. 19)

Two Angels entered Sodom at evening. At the gates they were met by Lot, who like Abraham was extremely hospitable, and bowed down to the ground, entreating them to pass the night at his home. Before they had even lain down to sleep the inhabitants of Sodom surrounded the house, intending to take advantage of the guests. Lot attempted to dissuade them, but in a fury they cried out, “Come out here! You a foreigner, and yet you would judge us? We will do even worse things to you than to them!”

The iniquitous ones began to break down the door, but the Angels led Lot into the house and locked the door, and struck the Sodomites blind. They wore themselves out seeking an entrance, for they did not wish to abandon their vile plans. Then the Angels told Lot to lead all of his own out of the city, since in the morning they would destroy that place. For great was the cry of those men to the Lord, and God had sent them to destroy that place. Lot hastened to his intended sons-in-law and began urging them to abandon the city, but they thought he was joking.

At sunrise the Angels began urging Lot to hurry, saying, *Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city* (Gen. 19:15). Seeing that he lingered, the Angels took him by the hand and lead him out of the gates, and said, *Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed* (Gen. 19:17).

Lot said to them, “No, Master! I cannot escape to the mountains. Misfortune will befall us there, and I will die. Rather, I will flee into this nearby city—it is small, and my life will be spared for Your sake!” And God promised to spare the little city, which was later called Zoar (“Small”). The sun rose over the earth, and Lot entered Zoar. And the Lord rained down fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and overthrew those cities, and all the vegetation in that land.

The wrath of God that thundered down upon that place of iniquity created a gigantic fissure eight thousand kilometers long, that destroyed this formerly paradisiacal place without leaving a trace. Today in place of this once fertile plain stretches the leaden expanse of a salt sea—the Dead Sea, in



which no life is possible. A truly deathly silence surrounds this terrible reservoir, its banks covered with salt and pieces of brimstone, with treacherous bituminous wells. Such is the landscape that meets those who arrive at the ruins of Sodom, of which nothing remains but a pile of ashes, as a memorial to God's wrath against those who commit the sin of sodomy.

Lot's wife, who regretted the loss of Sodom, turned back, and immediately became a pillar of salt. In reminding us of her fate (Lk. 17:32) the Lord commands us not to regret our past sinful life, from which He has saved us. Otherwise the curse of Lot's wife will overtake us as well. To this day, in the southern part of the Dead Sea there stands a statue of salt resembling a woman, that is known by all as "Lot's wife."

Lot settled in a cave near the remains of his wife, where, drunk with wine, he sinned with his own daughters. Thus God shows that a person must never trust to his own righteousness, but must be watchful and guard himself, especially against drunkenness.

## THE BIRTH OF ISAAC (Gen. 20–21)

**T**he terrible catastrophe of the fall of the damned cities forced Abraham to move closer to the Mediterranean Sea. There Sarah again was nearly carried off by the king of Gerar, but God appeared to him and commanded him to restore her to her husband. And the Lord said to Gerar, "He is a prophet, and if he prays I will forgive you." And so it happened, and at Abraham's prayer the punishment abated from the king of Gerar. This is an example for us, to turn to the prayers of the saints in difficult circumstances and obtain Divine aid through them.

A year after the appearance of God the Trinity at the Oak of Mamre, Sarah indeed gave birth to a son, when she was 90 years old, and her husband 100. On the eighth day the infant was circumcised and given the name Isaac, for Sarah said, *God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me ... Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age* (Gen. 21:6–7).

When the child had grown, Ishmael began to mistreat Isaac, and Sarah indignantly demanded that Hagar and her son be driven out, for the slave does not inherit together with the free man.

Abraham was grieved, but God commanded him to obey his wife, since in Isaac the promised seed would be fulfilled, while from Ishmael God promised to raise up a great nation because he was a son of Abraham. Then Abraham equipped Hagar and Ishmael and dismissed them. Hagar became

lost in the wilderness and wept, not wishing to see the death of her child. Then the Angel of God showed her a source of water, and thus they were saved from death. And God was with Ishmael, and from him proceeded twelve princes.

The apostle Paul, explaining why Ishmael was driven out, says that this is an allegory symbolizing the two Covenants between God and men. The first Covenant, enacted on Sinai, is Hagar the slave woman, because all its children are in slavery; while the New Covenant is Sarah, the image of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is a mother to us all. And we Christians are children of God's promise, after Isaac (Gal. 4:24–26, 28). Thus, stand in the freedom that Christ has bestowed upon us, and do not subject yourself again to the yoke of slavery, i.e., the Jewish laws.

## THE SACRIFICING OF ISAAC (Gen. 22)

**T**he Lord God decided to test Abraham's loyalty to the Creator.

"Abraham!" He said.

"Here am I!" the righteous man replied.

*Take now thy son, God said, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of* (Gen. 22:2).

Abraham arose early in the morning, split some wood, and taking Isaac and two servants went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day of their journey Abraham raised his eyes and saw the mountain. Then he said to his servants,

"Stay here; my son and I will go and worship there and then return."

Abraham took the wood and placed it upon Isaac's shoulders, then took the fire and the knife, and they went on. Along the way Isaac asked his father, "Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a whole-burnt offering?"

"God will provide for Himself the lamb for the whole-burnt offering," he replied.

They came to the place of which God had told Abraham, and he built an altar and placed the wood upon it, then bound his son and placed him upon the wood. Then Abraham reached out and took the knife to slay Isaac.

But the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven:

"Abraham! Abraham! Do not raise up your hand against the youth, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God and did not spare your only son for Me."

Looking up, Abraham saw behind him a ram that had become caught in the bushes by its horns. And he offered the lamb as a wholeburnt offering instead of his son, and called that place Jehovah-jireh (“He Who Is will provide”).

And again the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven and said, *By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice* (Gen. 22:16–18).

And Abraham returned and lived in Beersheba. On the mountain where Abraham was to have sacrificed Isaac the temple of Solomon was later erected. The ram was caught by the horns in a thicket beside Golgotha, where God the Father sacrificed His son for the sins of the people.

The sacrifice of Isaac foretold the Lord’s death on the cross. As here the father does not begrudge his son for God’s sake, so also God Himself does not spare His Son for the sake of men. Isaac humbly obeyed Abraham, and Jesus Christ humbly obeyed the Father, even to death—the ignominious death of the cross (Phil. 2:7). Isaac himself carried the wood for his whole-burning, and Christ bore His Cross upon His shoulders. Abraham foretold that God Himself would provide for Himself a lamb for the whole-burnt offering, and the Lord provided Jesus—the Lamb of God Who takes upon Himself the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). On the third day Abraham saw the mountain, and on the third day Christ saved us by His Resurrection. For this reason the Lord Jesus Himself said, *Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad* (Jn. 8:56). He saw it at the precise moment when he took his son from the altar alive, realizing that God had prepared another Sacrifice. Thus the Creator rewarded the faith of Abraham, who knew that God has power even to raise the dead. This is why chapters from the book of Genesis are read in the Church on the eve of Pascha.

## THE MARRIAGE OF ISAAC (Gen. 23–25)

Soon after this trial of Abraham’s faith, his wife Sarah died, at the age of 127. Abraham was then living near Hebron. He appealed to the inhabitants of the city, asking them to sell him a cave in which to bury Sarah, and they offered to let him use the cave of Machpelah that he had chosen for free, because they had seen the righteous one’s spiritual greatness. But he said that he would take the field and the cave only for silver, so that none would doubt

Abraham's rights to that place. Then the owner of the field sold the cave and the field for four hundred shekels of silver (3.6 kilograms). Thus for the first time the patriarch acquired a piece of property in the Holy Land. There he buried his spouse, and there he himself is buried. And to this day the bodies of the patriarchs rest in peace in Hebron, awaiting the day of the Resurrection, to enter into the true Promised Land.

After the death of his wife, being now quite aged, Abraham decided to arrange a marriage for his heir Isaac, who was now forty years old. He did not wish for his son to enter into marriage with an inhabitant of that land, because he feared the corruption by pagan beliefs and customs that are easily transmitted through the spouse.

To this end Abraham enlisted his closest servant, Eleazar, and said to him, "Swear to me by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of Canaan, but only from the land of my birth."

His servant swore, and the righteous one said that if the woman should refuse the servant would be free of his oath, but that even then he must not return Isaac to his homeland. Abraham said that God would send His Angel, Who would help him.

Eleazar took ten camels loaded with every kind of treasure, and left for Mesopotamia. When he arrived in the city, toward evening, he appealed to God in thought: "Send to meet me today her who is to become Isaac's wife. Let it be a sign to me that she will give both me and my camels to drink."

Before he had even finished his prayer, Rebecca, Abraham's niece, came out of the city. She was a maiden, and very beautiful. When she had gone down to the well and returned again with a full pitcher, the servant ran to her and said, "Give me to drink!"

"Drink, my lord," she said, "and I will draw for your camels as well."

The man looked at her in mute astonishment, wanting to know whether the Lord had blessed his path or not. When the camels ceased drinking Eleazar gave her a golden earring weighing half a shekel (4.5 grams) and two bracelets weighing ten shekels (90 grams), and asked who she was. She replied that she was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Nahor, and invited him in to visit.

Then the servant worshiped the Lord, and said, "Blessed is the Lord, the God of Abraham, Who has not abandoned my lord in His mercy and His truth! The Lord has led me by the straight path to the house of the brother of my lord."

In the meantime Rebecca ran and told her mother of the meeting. Her brother Laban ran out to meet the man and led him into the house. He was invited to eat, but he replied, "I will not eat until I tell you my business. I am a servant of Abraham. The Lord has exalted him, and he has commanded me

to find a wife for his son Isaac, who was given to Abraham by God in his old age. I asked the Lord, and He immediately fulfilled my wish: Rebecca came to the well and drew water not only for me, but also for my camels as well. I saw that God is watching over Abraham. Hence, I ask you to tell me: do you intend to show me mercy and give your daughter in marriage to the son of my lord?"

Then Bethuel, Rebecca's father, and her brother Laban answered, "This matter is come from the Lord. We cannot say anything against it, either good or bad."

When Abraham's servant heard this he worshiped the Lord. He delivered the presents to Rebecca and her relatives, then asked them to let him return home immediately. Then they called Rebecca herself and asked whether she was willing. She replied that she was.

Then they released her, blessing her thus: *Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them* (Gen. 24:60).

And Rebecca arose with her maidservant and went with the servant of Abraham. At evening Isaac went out into the field to pray (it was he that established evening worship), and God sent his future wife to meet him. Upon seeing him, Rebecca dismounted from the camel and veiled herself, adorning herself with the virtue of modesty. And Isaac took her to wife, and loved her, and was comforted in his sorrow for his mother Sarah.

So also Christians entering into marriage must avoid unions with unbelievers. The 72nd rule of the 5th–6th Ecumenical Councils declared null and void marriages where Christians marry non-Christians, for Christ cannot be joined to Belial, nor a sheep to a wolf. To find a good wife one must be guided not by the voice of lust, but by the Word of God and by prayer. Then God will send His Angel to us, as He did to Eleazar, and will make straight our path.

After Abraham had seen the Lord's help he died at the age of 175. He was buried beside his wife in the cave he had purchased in Machpelah, in Hebron. So greatly did the Lord love this righteous man that even a century later He continued to call Himself the God of Abraham (Ex. 3:6), promising to lead him into His eternity. Likewise, Scripture calls the place of blessedness for souls that are saved "the bosom of Abraham" (Lk. 16:22).

## JACOB AND ESAU (Gen. 25:19–27)

For a long time Isaac's wife, like his father's, was barren. Twenty years of marriage passed, and finally by Isaac's prayer Rebecca became pregnant. The sons in her womb began thrashing about, and she went to ask the Lord con-

cerning this. God answered her: *Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger* (Gen. 25:23).

Rebecca gives birth to twins. The first infant came into the world red and covered with hair, and he was named Esau (“hairy”). His brother was born clinging to Esau’s heel, and he was named Jacob (“holder of the heel” or “supplanter”). The birth of the twins was a prefiguration of the existence of two worlds: Esau is an image of this world, in which people live for the sake of flesh and blood, while Jacob is an image of the world to come, the universe, where righteousness abides. Here it mystically begins aforetime, as though grasping the heel of the first, and though it is the younger of the two the future belongs to it.

When the brothers grew up they proved to be of different temperaments: Esau was a man of the field and a skilled hunter, while Jacob was a meek, domestic man who remained in the tent. Isaac loved Esau because the game he killed was to his liking, while Rebecca loved Jacob.

Once Jacob cooked some food for himself, and Esau came in hungry from the hunt and said to him, “Give me some of your pottage, for I am tired.”

“Sell me your birthright,” Jacob answered, knowing that the Savior was to be descended from the first-born son.

“I am dying [apparently of hunger—*Auth.*]; of what good is this birthright to me?” Esau answered, and with an oath he sold his birthright to Jacob.

Jacob gave him bread and lentil pottage. Thus Esau disdained his birthright. People frequently exchange their spiritual merits for material goods, and then God rejects them as He did Esau: he soon married daughters of the Canaanites, and this was hard for his parents to bear.

Later there was again a famine in Palestine, and Isaac went to live in the land of the Philistines. There his wife was nearly taken away from him, but God preserved him and gave him great wealth and a rich harvest, showing that prosperity depends not on location, but on being united with the Creator.

The Philistines envied Isaac, and began breaking down and filling in his wells. King Abimelech demanded that Isaac leave, so he moved his tents to another place. But there too envy pursued him, until God appeared to him in Beersheba (Beer-Sheve): “I am the God of thy father, Abraham; fear not, for I am with you, and will multiply thy descendents for the sake of Abraham, My servant.”

Then Isaac built an altar and offered sacrifice to God. There Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, came to him with his court and made an alliance with him. Thus, if a person reveres the Creator He even reconciles his enemies to him.

When Isaac grew old he called Esau to come to him and said, *I am old. I do not know the day of my death. Now therefore, please take your weapons, your*

*quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die* (Gen. 27:2–4).

Upon hearing this, Rebecca called Jacob and commanded him to bring two kids, so that his father might bless Jacob and not Esau. Jacob did not wish this, but his mother persuaded him. She clothed Jacob in Esau's rich clothing, gave him a meal and bread, draped his smooth neck and arms with goatskins, and sent him to his father.

Isaac was surprised that Esau had so soon been successful in his hunt, and Jacob's voice also betrayed him. But when he felt him and smelt the smell of his clothes, he blessed him: *See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed: Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.* (Gen. 27:27–29).

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After Jacob had left his father, Esau came in. Isaac was horrified, but refused to take away Jacob's blessing, since he saw in this the will of God. Then Esau begged him with tears to bless him at least in some way. And Isaac said, *Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck* (Gen. 27:39–40).

After this Esau hated his brother and said, "Soon my father will die, and then I will kill my brother!" Then Rebecca feared for her children's lives and resolved to send Jacob to her brother, and Isaac supported her decision.

## JACOB IN HARAN (Gen. 28–30)

Submitting to his parents' decision, Jacob departed for Haran. In parting Isaac again blessed him and instructed him to take one of Laban's daughters to wife.

When he was going from Beersheba to Haran he stopped in a certain place. There night overtook him, and he went to sleep. During that night God showed him a vision of a ladder leading to heaven, upon which the angels ascended and descended. God, standing at the top of it, promised to return Jacob to the Holy Land and to be with him always. He promised to preserve him everywhere, and blessed him and, in his seed, all the nations of the earth.



The ladder symbolized the Theotokos, through whom God became Man (which is why this passage is read in the church on the eve of feasts in honor of the Theotokos), and the seed of Jacob is Christ, in Whom all men receive eternal salvation.

Awaking from sleep, Jacob cried, “Truly the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it! How terrible this place is! It is the house of God and the gate of heaven!”

Jacob took the stone upon which his head had lain and set it as a monument, and poured olive oil upon it in sacrifice. Then he called this place Beth-el (“house of God”), and promised that if God brought him back to the Holy Land he would give Him a tenth of everything.

The stone is an image of Jesus Christ, Who appeared to Jacob at the top of the ladder. The oil with which the stone was anointed is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, Who anointed Jesus. And Jacob’s promise is the basis of the pious custom of giving a tenth of one’s income to God.

Heartened by the vision, Jacob came to Mesopotamia. There, by a well, he met his uncle’s daughter Rachel. With his own two hands he removed the stone cover of the well, which could only be moved by all the shepherds working together, so that she could water her animals, and then he kissed her. Coming to her father Laban he asked for her to be given to him in marriage, but Laban required that he work seven years to earn her. Jacob loved Rachel very much and agreed to this. And the years seemed to him a single day.

When the agreed time had ended, Jacob asked that the wedding be held. But after the feast, instead of Rachel Laban brought Leah, her elder sister, to his tent. Thus was Jacob punished for deceiving his brother.

Jacob was indignant at Laban’s deed, but Laban said that he would give him Rachel if he worked another seven years for her. Laban had given him Leah because it was not customary to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder. Jacob married Rachel a week later, and loved her more than Leah, and he worked for Laban another seven years for her.

The Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and gave her four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel was envious of her sister and demanded that Jacob give her children from her servant Bilhah. He agreed, and Bilhah bore Rachel two sons: Dan and Naphtali.

Then Leah also demanded that Jacob give her children from her servant Zilpah. She gave birth to Gad and Asher. After this Leah bore two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter, Dinah.

Rachel attempted to use mandrakes to have children of her own, but nothing came of it until God took pity upon her and gave her a son, whom she named Joseph. After his birth Jacob went to Laban and asked him to let them return to his homeland. His father-in-law did not wish to let him go, however, because he saw that God’s blessing abode upon the house along with him,

and to keep Jacob Laban offered him work for hire. Jacob agreed, and asked that all the spotted livestock go to him, and all the solid-colored to Laban. Laban agreed, but to keep Jacob from growing too rich they agreed that the spotted animals would be separated from the solid-colored and herded under the supervision of Laban's sons. Thus Jacob's father-in-law calculated that God's blessing would be upon the flocks, and not with his son-in-law.

But God determined differently. An angel taught Jacob what to do, and he took branches of poplar, almond, and sycamore and placed them in view of the strong sheep and goats when they were conceiving, but placed none in front of the weaker. And the strong animals went to Jacob, while the weak went to Laban. Thus Jacob grew very rich, and the sons of Laban envied him and wanted to do him mischief.

### JACOB RETURNS TO CANAAN (Gen. 31–35)

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**T**wenty years passed since the time of Jacob's coming to Haran. Then the Lord appeared to him at night and commanded him to go secretly into Canaan. He took counsel with his wives and, taking his belongings, left Laban. Rachel stole the idols of her father's house, not wishing for him to worship creation instead of the Creator.

It was not until they reached the borders of the Holy Land that Laban caught up with his son-in-law, wishing to punish him for stealing the idols. But at night God appeared to him and forbade him to do Jacob any evil. Laban searched Jacob's entire camp, but did not find the idols, because Rachel sat upon them, saying that it was the time of her impurity. Then Jacob and Laban made an alliance, promising not to come to each other with evil intentions, and that Jacob would take no other wives. As a sign of their reconciliation they built up a mound and erected a monument as a witness to their agreement.

Laban returned from whence he came, and Jacob went home and met two regiments of angels of God who had come to guard him. But here he received news that Esau was on his way to meet him with four hundred warriors. He was very much afraid, and divided his caravan in two, saying that if Esau attacked one detachment the other would be able to flee. Then he prayed to God and asked His help: *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children* (Gen. 32:10–11).

After this Jacob sent many animals on ahead of him as a gift to Esau, to mollify him. Then he moved his wives and children across the river Jab-bok, while he remained on the opposite shore. That night God appeared to Jacob and wrestled with him all night, to teach him courage in acquiring the knowledge of God. When the sun rose He touched Jacob's thigh and wounded him, that he might understand that he was incapable of overcoming the Creator. But Jacob would not let Him go until He had blessed him.

God said, *Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel* [Godseer, or Contender with God—Auth.]: *for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed* (Gen. 32:28). Jacob wished to know the name of the One with Whom he had wrestled, but He said, *Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?* (Gen. 32: 29). Thus God showed that His Essence is unknowable for man, and there is no name that could perfectly describe Him.

The sun rose, and the Wrestler left Jacob, and as a reminder of that fight the latter became lame in his right thigh. Thus the Lord gives a special task both to the righteous Jacob and to his descendents, who from that time forth have borne the name of Israel (the Hebrews). Two roads stand before this nation: to be a nation of God-seers, or to be a tribe of God-resisters. The spiritual Israel is likewise the Orthodox Church, whose children learn how to see God.

And so Jacob sees Esau coming toward him with a detachment. Leaving his caravans behind, he ran and bowed down to his brother seven times. Esau embraced him and wept, showing that he was reconciled to him. So we too must learn to make peace with our opponents, discarding arrogance and giving them gifts. Then God will help us, healing both our hearts and theirs.

Then Esau invited Jacob to his home on Mount Seir, but Jacob declined. Esau returned from whence he came, and soon became the king of Edom and the progenitor of a new nation: the Edomites. God gave the city of Seir over into Esau's dominion, and he drove out the giants that lived there.

In the meantime Jacob returned from Mesopotamia and settled in Shechem, where he purchased a piece of field and there erected an altar to God. In this place a trial awaited him. The son of the king of Shechem raped Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and then asked for her hand. Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, decided to avenge her. They demanded that all the inhabitants of Shechem be circumcised, and when they had done so the brothers fell upon the city and cut down its menfolk. Jacob condemned the brothers for their sacrilegious use of the sacred rite, and for rousing all the Canaanites against him.

Then God commanded Jacob to go to Bethel and to build an altar there, in fulfillment of the promise given to Him. Then Jacob commanded everyone to be cleansed of idols and of all impurity. At Shechem Jacob buried all the idols beneath an oak, so as not to incur God's anger upon his family.

When Jacob came to Bethel he kept his vow, and the Lord brought fear upon all the Canaanites, so that they did not pursue him. God again appeared to him in Bethel and confirmed the promises He had given to Abraham and Isaac: *I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land* (Gen. 35:11–12).

God ascended from him, and at the place of God's appearance Jacob erected a pillar as a monument to the Creator. Christians likewise erect temples in remembrance of the great works of God.

From there Jacob went to the tower Gader. Along the way, near Bethlehem, his beloved Rachel died while giving birth to their son Benjamin. The tomb of Rachel stands near Bethlehem to this day, where the inconsolable Jacob sobbed over her.

Soon Jacob's eldest son Reuben lost his birthright by committing fornication with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid.

Finally Jacob returned to his father Isaac, who lived in Hebron, and Isaac died in the arms of Jacob and his brother Esau.

## JOSEPH THE FAIR (Gen. 37–41)

Jacob's favorite son was Joseph. He was seventeen years old, and was a shepherd together with his brothers, and would bear tales about them to his father. Jacob loved Joseph very much and singled him out, making him a present of a coat of many colors. His brothers envied him, and when Joseph had prophetic dreams their hatred particularly intensified.

His first dream was this: Joseph and his brothers were harvesting a field. Suddenly his sheaf stood upright, and the sheaves of his brothers bowed down to it. In his second dream Joseph saw the sun and the moon and eleven stars bow down to him. Then his brothers were indignant and said, "Will you really rule over us?"

His brothers went to herd their sheep in Shechem, while Joseph remained with their father. Then Jacob sent him to look in on his children, to see whether they were well. As he was going, a guardian angel met him and showed him the path to his brothers in Dothan.

When his brothers saw him, they said to one another, "Here comes the lord of dreams. Let us kill him, and then we will see whether his dreams will come true. We will say that a beast devoured Joseph."

But Reuben, secretly wishing to save Joseph, said, "Do not shed his blood; throw him into a pit in the desert."

This they did: they tore the coat of many colors from Joseph and threw him into a waterless pit. Then they sat down to eat, and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites carrying spices to Egypt. And at Judah's advice the brothers sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.

Later Reuben came to retrieve Joseph, but found the pit empty. He was in despair, and asked what he would tell his father. But the brothers decided to smear Joseph's coat with the blood of a kid and bring it to Jacob, who rent his clothes and wept over his son for many days, saying, "A beast has torn Joseph to pieces, and in sorrow I will go down to my son in hades!"

In the meantime Joseph was brought to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the captain of the guard.

The story of Joseph was a prefiguration of the life of a Christian, in which another life, that of the Spirit, is gradually born, inciting the envy of carnal men. It also prefigured the Lord's economy: Joseph was the first-born of the favorite wife Rachel, and Christ is the Son according to the flesh of Mary, who is full of grace. Joseph was the favorite son of Jacob, and Jesus is the Beloved Son of the Heavenly Father (Mt. 3:17). Joseph's father sends him to his brethren and to their sheep, and the Lord's Father sends Him to the sheep of the lost house of Israel (Mt. 15:24). The brethren did not receive Joseph, and Christ's own did not receive Him (Jn. 1:11). Joseph, like Christ, falls victim to the vanity of men (Mt. 27:18). Joseph is thrown into a pit, and Christ descends into hades. Joseph is sold to foreigners for twenty pieces of silver, and Jesus is sold for thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 26:15) and given over to the pagans.

At that time Judah married a Canaanite woman, who bore him three children. His eldest son, Er, married Tamar, but he did not please God, and he died childless. In accordance with the law his second brother, Onan, married Tamar, but he did not wish for the son to bear his brother's name, and so he committed the sin of masturbation, which later came to bear his name (onanism). This was not pleasing to God, and He slew Onan.

Upon learning of Onan's death Judah refused to give Tamar his third son, but she wished to receive the blessing that rested upon the Israelites. To achieve this she dressed as a harlot and, unrecognized, seduced Judah, after first securing a token from him. When Tamar was found to be pregnant Judah wanted to burn her for fornication, but she sent him his token. Judah said that she was more right than he, and acknowledged his children. It turned out that she was carrying twins, and when during the birth the hand of one (Zarah) appeared first a red thread was tied to it, but the first to emerge was his brother (Pharez, a forefather of Christ). Thus the first-born proved to be second. The fathers of the Church see in this a prefiguration of the New and Old Testaments. The New Testament was promised first, but the first to come was the Old Testament.

In Egypt God kept Joseph under His protection, and so the house of Potiphar was always filled with the Lord's good pleasure for Joseph's sake. Noticing this, Potiphar appointed him steward of his house and entrusted him with all its affairs. Potiphar's wife saw Joseph's beauty and wished to commit adultery with him, but he refused. Once she attempted to force him, but he tore himself free, leaving her holding his garment. Then Potiphar's wife slandered Joseph to him, and Joseph was thrown into the royal prison.

But even here the Lord did not desert His servant: He gave him favor in the eyes of the prison warden, and Joseph became the prison administrator.

At that time Pharaoh imprisoned two of his courtiers: the baker and the butler. Once they had certain dreams, and Joseph interpreted their meaning for them.

The butler's dream was this: he saw a grapevine with three branches, bearing grapes, and he plucked them and placed them in the king's hands. Joseph said this meant that in three days the butler would be acquitted and would again stand before Pharaoh. And Joseph asked him to remember him to the king, because he had done no wrong.

The baker's dream was different: he was carrying three baskets of baked goods on his head, and the birds flocked around him and pecked the bread. Joseph said the three baskets were three days, at the conclusion of which he would be hanged, and the birds would peck his carcass.

The interpretation proved accurate. Three days later it was Pharaoh's birthday. The butler was acquitted and restored to his post, while the baker was hanged. But the butler forgot his promise to Joseph, for Joseph ought to have put his trust in God, not in man.

Two years passed, at which time Pharaoh had dreams that none could interpret for him. His dreams were these: he saw that he was sitting on the shore of the Nile, from which seven fat cows emerged, followed by seven lean cows. And the latter devoured the former. The second dream was like the first: on a single stalk seven fat ears of wheat grew, followed by seven that were lean and windblown. But the lean ears devoured the fat ones.

None of Pharaoh's wise men could correctly interpret his dream. Only then did the butler remember Joseph, and he was brought to Pharaoh. Joseph said that the dreams actually meant the same thing: seven years of plenty lay ahead, followed by seven years of famine sent by God. For this reason the grain ought to be harvested and stored in storehouses, to feed the people during the years of famine.

Then Pharaoh gave him his ring and exalted Joseph, placed him in his own chariot and set him over the entire kingdom of Egypt, that all should bow before him. Joseph was then thirty years old. The seven years of plenty came, and then he stored up reserves of grain. At that time he married

Asenath and begat two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Then came the years of famine throughout the land, but in Egypt there was bread, and people began coming from all the countries to Egypt for bread.

Here, in this period of Joseph's life, we see prefigurations of the life of Christ. Joseph is unjustly cast into prison, and Christ is condemned by Pilate, though the latter found no fault in Him (Jn. 18:38). Joseph was in prison for three years; the Lord was in hades for three days. In prison Joseph proclaims freedom to one prisoner, and death to another. Jesus promised salvation to one of the thieves, and descended into hades to proclaim liberation.

Joseph comes out of prison and becomes king over Egypt, clothed in bright garments, mounted upon a chariot and receiving obeisance. The Lord rose from the grave and received all power in heaven and on earth from the Father (Mt. 28:18). And before Him every knee bows down (Phil. 2:10), of both Jews and gentiles. Joseph feeds all the earth with bread, subjugating all Egypt to Pharaoh. In feeding the Church with His Body, the Bread of Life (Jn. 51), Jesus Christ subjugates all to God the Father.

The memory of Joseph the Fair is celebrated on Monday of Passion Week.

## THE HEBREW MIGRATION TO EGYPT

(Gen. 42–47)

**T**he seven years of plenty passed, and the famine foretold by Joseph set in, striking not only Egypt, but all the earth. Then Jacob sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy bread, but kept Benjamin with him.

The brothers came to Joseph and bowed down before him to the ground. Joseph recognized them, but they did not know him. Then Joseph said to them, "You are spies, come to learn the weak places of the earth."

"No, lord!" the brothers answered. "We are not spies, but the sons of one man. There were twelve of us; one remained with our father, and the other is no more."

Then Joseph said, "You can prove that you are not spies if you bring your remaining brother. Then we will believe you. You will send one of your number after your brother." And he sent them away under guard for three days.

At the end of the three days he said to them, "I fear God, and so you will go and take the bread home, but one will remain here. And bring your brother, else you will die."

The brothers said to each other, "We are punished for our sin against the brother we sold; we saw his sufferings, and did not listen to him."



Joseph heard this, and going out he wept. When he returned he ordered that one of the brothers, Simeon, be placed under guard, and the others he gave grain and sent them home, secretly placing their silver in the bags with the bread. The brothers were very surprised when they saw their silver restored to them. They told their father what had occurred, but he did not wish to let Benjamin go, as he was Rachel's son.

A year later the famine intensified, and Jacob was obliged to send the brothers back to Egypt. Judah promised his father to take care of Benjamin, taking responsibility for his life.

When the brothers came to Egypt they were led into Joseph's house, and he held a feast for them. Upon seeing Benjamin Joseph went into an inner room, for he could not hold back his tears. The next day the brothers were given grain, and at Joseph's orders their silver was again secretly placed in the bags, but into Benjamin's bag a silver cup was placed. Joseph wished in this way to test his brothers.

When they had left Joseph sent the steward of his house after them. When he caught up with them he said, "Why have you repaid evil for good? Why have you stolen my master's cup?"

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The brothers were indignant and demanded that they be searched, and the cup was found in Benjamin's possession. Then they all returned to Joseph. Judah interceded for his brother and asked that he be punished in Benjamin's stead, so as to spare their father. Joseph saw that his brothers had long since changed and repented of their evil deed, and he revealed himself to them. "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold!" he cried. "But do not be sad, for God sent me here to save your lives."

They were troubled, but Joseph comforted them and sent them home to their father, saying for him to come and live in Egypt, where he would feed the whole nation of Israel, and Pharaoh asked this as well. The brothers went to Jacob, bearing rich presents from Joseph, who had sent with them chariots to bring them to Egypt.

When Jacob learned of all this he was enlivened in spirit and said, "It is enough for me that my son Joseph is yet alive!"

Jacob went to Beersheba, where he offered a sacrifice to the Lord in the hope of learning His will regarding the departure to Egypt. And in a vision by night God said to Israel, *Jacob, Jacob ... I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes* (Gen. 46:2–4).

Then Jacob and seventy men with him brought their property and moved to Egypt. There Joseph met him after seventeen years apart, and fell upon his father's breast. Jacob said, "Now I will die, having seen your face!"

They settled in Egypt, and Joseph kept them fed with bread until the end of the famine. The brothers were entrusted with shepherding the flocks in the land of Goshen, and Jacob met with Pharaoh and blessed him.

In the meantime the silver with which those in Egypt had purchased bread from Joseph came to an end, and in exchange for bread Joseph bought up the entire land of Egypt. All the Egyptians became Pharaoh's servants, under obligation to pay him a fifth of their harvest. The Egyptians themselves were perfectly happy with this, and said that Joseph had saved their lives.

After seventeen years Jacob called Joseph to him and made him swear that he would bury him in Hebron beside his fathers. When he had sworn, Jacob bowed upon the head of his staff, thereby rendering honor to Christ Who was to come.

## JACOB'S LAST DAYS AND HIS BLESSING (Gen. 48–50)

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Jacob fell ill and called Joseph to him. Joseph brought to him his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz and blessed me, promising to make me fruitful and to give me the land of Canaan for my dominion. And behold, your two sons, born to you in Egypt, are mine, like Reuben and Symeon. All the rest of your children will be yours and will enter into their inheritance bearing the name of their brothers."

Then Joseph led Manasseh and Ephraim to Jacob, and he kissed and embraced them. "I did not hope to see your face, but God has even showed me your children," said Jacob.

After this he laid his hands crosswise upon Ephraim and Manasseh, thereby placing his right hand on the younger, and his left upon the elder (to the Hebrews the right hand was preferred over the left, and thus he gave preference to the younger, Ephraim), and said, foretelling the Holy Trinity: *God, before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth* (Gen. 48:15–16).

Joseph wished to switch his father's hands, but his father did not permit him, saying that the younger would become greater than the elder. Jacob did not do this by accident, but rather to indicate the mystery of salvation accomplished through the Cross.

A short time later Jacob became terminally ill, and called his sons to him. To each of them the patriarch foretold the future of his descendants. He appointed Judah as the first-born, since Reuben had sinned through incest, and Simeon and Levi through their savage cruelty during the seizure of Shechem. Judah then foretold to Jacob that from his tribe Christ would be born: *Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding His foal unto the vine, and His ass's colt unto the choice vine; He washed His garments in wine, and His clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and His teeth white with milk* (Gen. 49:8–12).

These words foretold that the tribe of Judah would grow from a lion's whelp (during the conquest of Canaan) into a lion (under Kings David and Solomon), until the kingship should depart from Israel, at which time Shiloh ("the Conciliator") Christ would come, to Whom all the pagan nations would be subject. The sign of His appearance would be that the King would tie his ass to the sacred vine (for in the temple at Jerusalem there hung a golden vine), as indeed occurred when Jesus rode into Jerusalem before His sufferings. These very sufferings are indicated in that the Messiah would wash His garments in the blood of grapes (the comparison with grapes refers to the Lord's virgin birth, and also to the fact that at the Last Supper He made wine to be His Blood). But after His sufferings victory and the eternal feast of the Kingdom await Him.

To Dan it was foretold that the antichrist would come forth from him (an adder in the path). To Joseph abundant earthly blessings were promised, as indeed occurred, when his descendant Joshua the son of Nun conquered Palestine. To the other sons the fate of their descendants was likewise foretold.

After Jacob had blessed his children he willed that he be buried in the double cave at Machpelah, together with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, and Leah. And Jacob who was called Israel died, at the age of 147, and Joseph and his brothers, accompanied by an escort of Egyptians, buried their father near Hebron.

After the death of their father the brothers thought Joseph would take revenge against them, but he said, "Fear not! I fear God. He turned your evil for good. Thus the Lord preserved your lives. I will feed both you and your children."

At the age of 100 Joseph died, leaving instructions that they take his bones with them when they would leave Egypt.

## THE BIRTH OF MOSES (Ex. 1–2)

The Hebrew nation multiplied extremely rapidly in Egypt, being blessed by God. After the death of Joseph and his brothers a Pharaoh came to power who had forgotten the benefactions of Joseph. Pharaoh was afraid that the Hebrews might side with the enemies of the state, and to avoid this he decided that the people should be oppressed. The Hebrews were declared slaves and forced to build cities for storage, and were also exhausted by forced labor in the fields. But God multiplied His people still more.

Then Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all newborn Hebrew boys, but they feared God and did not commit this iniquity. To the king they said that the Hebrew women were stronger than the Egyptian women, and gave birth themselves without their aid before they arrived. Then Pharaoh commanded all Egyptians to kill all newborn boys, so as to destroy the Hebrew people nonetheless.

At that time a certain descendant of Levi named Amram married Jochebed, and she bore him a son, when the law ordering the slaying of the newborn Hebrew boys had already been passed. The child was born very beautiful, and his parents hid him three months. When it was no longer possible to hide him they laid the infant in a basket coated with pitch, and placed it at the river's edge, among the bullrushes. The boy's sister hid nearby, to see what would become of him.

At that time Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, and saw the basket with the crying infant. The princess took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew children." His sister offered to bring her a wet nurse, and Pharaoh's daughter agreed, and even paid her wages (the wet nurse was the child's own mother). When the child grew up, Pharaoh's daughter took him to live with her as her son, and gave him the name Moses, meaning "taken from the water."

He grew up in the court of Pharaoh, and when he was an adult he once saw an overseer mistreating a Hebrew. In anger he killed the overseer and buried him in the sand. The next day Moses attempted to separate two Hebrews who were fighting, but one of them said, "Who placed you in charge here? Or do you wish to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?"

Thus Moses realized that the Hebrew he had saved had already reported him. And so he was obliged to flee from Egypt, where Pharaoh had given orders for his execution. He came to the land of Midian, and there by a well he defended the daughters of the priest in those parts, Reuel Jethro, from the shepherds who were driving them away from the water. Reuel took him in and married him to his daughter Zipporah.

## GOD'S APPEARANCE TO MOSES IN THE BURNING BUSH (Ex. 3-4)

Moses shepherded the sheep of his father-in-law. One day, moved by an invisible force, he drove his flock far off to the edge of the wilderness and came to God's mountain, Horeb. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from out of a thorn bush. Moses beheld a frightful apparition: a bush was burning without being consumed. Amazed, he decided to go and look at this great phenomenon. Then God called to him from out of the fire:

"Moses! Do not approach; take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look God in the eye. He took off his sandals, so that no dead thing would separate him from the original Life. The burning bush was itself a prefiguration of the Theotokos, who received the Creator and was not consumed.

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God said to Moses, "I have seen the suffering of My people and heard their cry. I know their sorrows, and have come to free them from slavery and lead them into a wonderful land flowing with milk and honey. Go; I send you to Pharaoh, to lead the Hebrews out of slavery."

But Moses began to refuse, saying, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and lead the Hebrews out of slavery?" But the Lord promised to be with him.

Then Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them: 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask, 'What is His name, then?'"

"I Am That I Am," God replied. "Say just that: I Am [i.e., Jehovah] has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and My memorial unto all generations. The Hebrews will believe you, but Pharaoh will become hard of heart until I show upon him My power, and then He will let you go.

This name, "I Am," with which God appeared to Moses, means that God is outside time and nature. He contains within Himself the source of His Existence. He alone truly exists, independent of any external cause, and all that exists has its existence only through His will.

So that the people would believe Moses God showed him miracles that would confirm his ministry: his staff turned into a snake, but when Moses seized it by the tail it again became his staff. Thus the power of the devil proved insignificant before God's prophet. Then at God's command Moses put his hand into his bosom, and it became covered with leprous sores. Then he placed it into his bosom again, and it was healed, for God has the power to heal a man's life, which is leprous with sin. And the Lord said that if they did

not believe the first two wonders they would believe a third, and commanded him to take water from the river and turn it into blood.

But Moses continued to refuse God's commission, citing his slowness of speech. And God promised to be at his mouth, so that he would become a god to Pharaoh, and his brother Aaron would be to him a prophet. Then Moses consented, and went into Egypt. Along the way God nearly gave Moses over to death for not having circumcised his son, and only the fact that his wife Zepporah circumcised him according to the law saved him from death. Here we see that no circumstances can justify a person who fails to fulfill God's commandment. Moses was a messenger of the Lord, but he too was obligated to do His will.

## THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT (Ex. 5–10)

When Moses returned to Egypt the Hebrew people recognized him as God's messenger. Then he and his brother Aaron went to Pharaoh and demanded that he let the Hebrews go into the desert to observe a feast of the Lord; otherwise He would send plagues upon Egypt. But Pharaoh replied, "I do not know the Lord, and I will not let the people go."

And Pharaoh commanded that the people's labors be made more burdensome, and said, "You are idle; this is why you wish to make service to God."

Then God told Moses that the time had come for Him to reveal his might upon Egypt. Moses and Aaron again went to Pharaoh, and Aaron cast his rod before him, and the rod became a snake. At Pharaoh's command the Egyptian sorcerers did the same, but Aaron's rod devoured the rods of the Egyptians. Pharaoh's symbol was a cobra, and the fact that it was devoured by the miraculously transformed rod of Aaron bespoke the insignificance of the king's power before God. But Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to obey God.

Then began the time of the plagues. In the morning Moses went to meet Pharaoh as he was going to the Nile, and struck the water. The water immediately became blood, so that everything living in it died. But the Egyptian sorcerers worked similar charms upon the water. Pharaoh refused to learn from this miracle, either.

A week after the first miracle the Lord sent the second plague upon Egypt. At Moses' command the earth was filled with toads, which made their way into the food and the beds of the Egyptians. Then Pharaoh asked for mercy and promised to let the Hebrews go to offer sacrifice to God. All the toads died, but Pharaoh did not keep his promise, and did not let the Hebrews go.

Then, at Moses' command, Aaron struck the dust of the earth with his rod, and immediately a swarm of lice fell upon the Egyptians and their flocks. Here too the sorcerers attempted to imitate the prophet, but accomplished nothing. They said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But he hardened his heart and did not let the people go.

The next morning Moses met Pharaoh at the water and foretold a new plague: an invasion of flies (a type of large gadfly). The next day a swarm of flies fell upon the land of Egypt, while the country of Goshen, where the Hebrews lived, was left unharmed. Pharaoh proposed that they offer sacrifice to God in Egypt, but Moses refused. Pharaoh promised to let the people go, but when the flies went away at the prophet's prayer he again refused to keep his promise.

Then the Lord sent a murrain upon the cattle of the Egyptians, while the cattle of the Hebrews were left unharmed. But here too Pharaoh refused to heed the Creator, though the Lord clearly showed him that no animals, neither bulls nor sheep, are gods.

The time of the sixth plague arrived. Moses and Aaron took up handfuls of ashes and tossed them into the air in the sight of Pharaoh. And immediately dust arose over Egypt, and inflamed boils broke out upon all the Egyptians and their cattle. The sorcerers could no longer withstand Moses, for they were covered with sores. But this punishment too did not correct Pharaoh, so great was his pride.

In the morning Moses relayed God's word to Pharaoh:

"I will send wounds upon your heart and the hearts of your servants, so that you will know that there is none like Me in all the earth. I could have destroyed you and your people from off the face of the earth. But I have preserved you, to show My power upon you and that My name might be glorified in all the earth. Tomorrow morning I will send hail upon Egypt, such as there has not been since the beginning of time."

Those who believed Moses gathered their flocks and servants into shelters, while those who had not turned to the Lord left everything in the fields. Then at the Lord's command Moses raised his rod to heaven, and there fell upon Egypt hail mixed with fire. Terrible lightning battered the earth, and fire rained down, consuming everything, and the hail was no hindrance to it. All who were in the fields perished; the grass was burnt up, and the crops were crushed and the trees broken. Only in the land of Goshen there was no hail. Pharaoh was frightened, but when the hail ceased at Moses' command he again disobeyed God. The king proposed that only the men go into the wilderness, and that the children be left as hostages in Egypt.

Then God sent locusts upon the country, which flew in upon an east wind. They covered the earth and devoured everything that had survived the hail. Pharaoh hastily summoned the prophet and begged to be saved from



this death. Moses prayed to God, and a westerly wind carried the locusts away and cast them into the Red Sea. But Pharaoh again broke his promise.

Then the ninth plague began. Moses stretched out his hands to heaven, and a palpable darkness came upon Egypt, proceeding from the abyss of hades. For three days none of the Egyptians could see each other; only the Hebrews had light.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go and serve God, but leave your property here."

But the prophet answered that they would take everything. Pharaoh became angry and did not let them go, saying to Moses and Aaron, "Do not appear before me again, or you shall die."

"As you have said, so let it be," Moses replied. "We will see your face no more."

## THE PASSOVER OF THE LORD (Ex. 11–12)

The Lord said to Moses that He would send down a final, tenth punishment upon Egypt, and Pharaoh would let the people go. He commanded the Hebrews to offer a lamb as a sacrifice of redemption, to save them from the greatest punishment. One lamb was to be taken for each family, or one kid, and it was to be a yearling of the male sex. The lamb was to be selected on the tenth day of the first month of spring, and slain on the evening of the fourteenth day. Then its blood was to be smeared on the door posts, and the meat roasted with fire. During the night it was to be eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and it was to be eaten entirely—head, legs, and entrails—and what they could not eat was to be burned in the fire. It was not to be left uneaten until the morning, and the bones were not to be broken. Furthermore, those who partook of the sacrifice were to be dressed, girded about, holding their staffs. This was the Lord's Passover.

This the Israelites did. They slew a lamb and anointed the door posts with blood using a bunch of hyssop (a special fragrant herb), and partook of the sacrifice. The dread night of the fourteenth day of the first month arrived. The Israelites gathered in their homes and partook of the holy sacrifice, and no one went outside until morning came.

At midnight the Lord went out over Egypt, and an angel went before His face. He passed over all the homes where he saw the sign of the blood upon the door posts, but the angel filled all the other homes with death: he killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, from the son of Pharaoh to the sons of those sitting in prison. Hence this great feast was called Passover (from the Hebrew word *pesach*—"to pass by"), for none of the Hebrews perished. But

in the homes of the Egyptians terrible cries and lamentations were heard, for there was not a single home without a corpse.

Immediately Pharaoh summoned Moses to him and commanded the Hebrews to leave Egypt. And the Hebrews left, and a multitude of others who had joined them, going out of the country of their enslavement. This occurred on the same night when Abraham had left Haran, 430 years before.

The deliverance of the Hebrews from death was an image of our great Passover, or Pascha—the deliverance from the spiritual Pharaoh, which is Satan. According to Gregory the Theologian, the paschal Lamb Christ is “a purification, not for a part of the world, nor for a short time, but for the whole world and for all time. For this reason a Lamb was chosen (Ex. 12:5) for its innocence, and its clothing of the original nakedness. For such is the Victim, That was offered for us, Who is both in Name and fact the Garment of incorruption. And He was a perfect Victim not only on account of His Godhead, than which nothing is more perfect; but also on account of that which He assumed having been anointed with Deity, and having become one with That which anointed It, and I am bold to say, made equal with God. A Male, because offered for Adam; or rather the Stronger for the strong, when the first Man had fallen under sin; and chiefly because there is in Him nothing feminine, nothing unmanly; but He burst from the bonds of the Virgin-Mother’s womb with much power, and a Male was brought forth by the Prophetess, as Isaiah declares the good tidings (Is. 8:3). And of a year old, because He is the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2) setting out from heaven, and circumscribed by His visible Nature, and returning unto Himself. And the blessed crown of Goodness (Ps. 64:12), being on every side equal to Himself and alike; and not only this, but also as giving life to all the circle of the virtues, gently commingled and intermixed with each other, according to the Law of Love and Order. And Immaculate and guileless, as being the Healer of faults, and of the defects and taints that come from sin. For though He both took on Him our sins and bare our diseases (Is. 53:4), yet He did not Himself suffer anything that needed healing ...

“The First Month is introduced, or rather the beginning of months (Ex. 12:2), whether it was so among the Hebrews from the beginning, or was made so later on this account, and became the first in consequence of the Mystery; and the tenth of the Month, for this is the most complete number, of units the first perfect unit, and the parent of perfection. And it is kept until the fifth day (Ex. 12:6), perhaps because the Victim, of Whom I am speaking, purifies the five senses, from which comes falling into sin, and around which the war rages, inasmuch as they are open to the incitements to sin. And it was chosen, not only out of the lambs, but also out of the inferior species, which are placed on the left hand (Mt. 25:33) — the kids; because He is sacrificed not only for the righteous, but also for sinners; and perhaps even more for

these, inasmuch as we have greater need of His mercy. And we need not be surprised that a lamb for a house should be required as the best course, but if that could not be, then one might be obtained by contributions (owing to poverty) for the houses of a family; because it is clearly best that each individual should suffice for his own perfecting, and should offer his own living sacrifice holy unto God Who called him, being consecrated at all times and in every respect. But if that cannot be, then that those who are akin in virtue and of like disposition should be made use of as helpers. For I think this provision means that we should communicate of the Sacrifice to those who are nearest, if there be need.

“Then comes the Sacred Night, the Anniversary of the confused darkness of the present life, into which the primæval darkness is dissolved, and all things come into life and rank and form, and that which was chaos is reduced to order. Then we flee from Egypt, that is from sullen persecuting sin; and from Pharaoh the unseen tyrant, and the bitter taskmasters, changing our quarters to the world above; and are delivered from the clay and the brick-making, and from the husks and dangers of this fleshly condition, which for most men is only not overpowered by mere husklike calculations. Then the Lamb is slain, and act and word are sealed with the Precious Blood; that is, habit and action, the sideposts of our doors; I mean, of course, of the movements of mind and opinion, which are rightly opened and closed by contemplation, since there is a limit even to thoughts. Then the last and gravest plague upon the persecutors, truly worthy of the night; and Egypt mourns the first-born of her own reasonings and actions ... the whole air is full of the cry and clamour of the Egyptians; and then the Destroyer of them shall withdraw from us in reverence of the Unction. Then the removal of leaven; that is, of the old and sour wickedness, not of that which is quickening and makes bread; for seven days, a number which is of all the most mystical, and is co-ordinate with this present world, that we may not lay in provision of any Egyptian dough, or relic of Pharisaic or ungodly teaching.

“Well, let them lament; we will feed on the Lamb toward evening— for Christ’s Passion was in the completion of the ages; because too He communicated His Disciples in the evening with His Sacrament, destroying the darkness of sin; and not sodden, but roast (Ex. 12:8–9)—that our word may have in it nothing that is unconsidered or watery, or easily made away with; but may be entirely consistent and solid, and free from all that is impure and from all vanity. And let us be aided by the good coals (Is. 6:6), kindling and purifying our minds from Him that comes to send fire on the earth (Lk. 12:49), that shall destroy all evil habits, and to hasten its kindling. Whatsoever then there be, of solid and nourishing in the Word, shall be eaten with the inward parts and hidden things of the mind, and shall be consumed and given up to spiritual digestion; aye, from head to foot, that is, from the first contemplations

of Godhead to the very last thoughts about the Incarnation. Neither let us carry anything of it abroad, nor leave it till the morning (Ex. 12:10); because most of our Mysteries may not be carried out to them that are outside, nor is there beyond this night any further purification; and procrastination is not creditable to those who have a share in the Word ... But whatever is of bony nature and not fit for food and hard for us even to understand, this must not be broken; that is, badly divined and misconceived (I need not say that in the history not a bone of Jesus was broken, even though His death was hastened by His crucifiers on account of the Sabbath); nor must it be stripped off and thrown away, lest that which is holy should be given to the dogs (Mt. 7:6), that is, to the evil hearers of the Word; just as the glorious pearl of the Word is not to be cast before swine; but it shall be consumed with the fire with which the burnt offerings also are consumed, being refined and preserved by the Spirit that searches and knows all things ...

“Nor would it be right for us to pass over the manner of this eating either, for the Law does not do so, but carries its mystical labour even to this point in the literal enactment. Let us consume the Victim in haste, eating It with unleavened bread, with bitter herbs, and with our loins girded, and our shoes on our feet, and leaning on staves like old men; with haste, that we fall not into that fault which was forbidden to Lot by the commandment, that we look not around, nor stay in all that neighbourhood, but that we escape to the mountain, that we be not overtaken by the strange fire of Sodom (Gen. 19:17), nor be congealed into a pillar of salt in consequence of our turning back to wickedness; for this is the result of delay. With bitter herbs, for a life according to the Will of God is bitter and arduous, especially to beginners, and higher than pleasures. For although the new yoke is easy and the burden light, as you are told (Mt. 11:20), yet this is on account of the hope and the reward, which is far more abundant than the hardships of this life ... But let that part of your being which is the seat of passion, and which neighs, as Holy Scripture calls it (Jer. 5:8), when sweeping away this shameful passion, be restrained by a girdle of continence, so that you may eat the Passover purely, having mortified your members which are upon the earth (Col. 3:5).”<sup>84</sup>

## THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA (Ex. 13–15)

Thus, late that night the Hebrews left Egypt, and at the Lord's command as they left they took from the Egyptians all they had earned during their years of slavery. Here the Church sees an indication that Christians must use all that was good in pagan culture as their inheritance, for all good things are

<sup>84</sup> Saint Gregory the Theoloian, Homily 45: At Holy Pascha

from God. Remembering Joseph's command, the Israelites took his bones with them as a sacred relic.

The Lord Himself laid the path for Israel. He went before them by day in the form of a pillar of cloud, and by night as a pillar of fire, and so it went throughout their wandering through the wilderness. He did not lead them to Palestine by the short path, so that the people might not be frightened by war, but led them to the Red Sea. When Pharaoh learned of this, he thought the Hebrews had lost their way, and his hardened heart rebelled against God for the last time.

"Why did we let the Hebrews go, that they should not work for us?" Pharaoh asked.

Immediately he gathered all the chariots of Egypt and set off in pursuit of the Israelites. The army caught up with the people of God when there was no place for them to go. The Israelites were terribly frightened, and cried out to Moses, "Were there really not enough coffins in Egypt, that you had to take us out to die in the wilderness?"

But Moses said to them, praying in heart, "Do not be afraid; stand fast, and you will see the Lord's salvation, for you shall never see the Egyptians again."

In answer to the prophet's wordless prayer God said to him, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go on. Strike the water with your rod, and the water will be divided, and they will pass through the sea upon dry land. I will show My glory to Pharaoh and all his hosts."

The pillar of fire went to stand between the Egyptians and the Hebrews and did not let them approach all night, and it was a light for the Hebrews, but darkness for the Egyptians. And Moses stretched out his hand upon the sea, and a hurricane drove the sea apart. The waters stood like walls to the right and to the left, and the Hebrews went through the sea as upon dry land. Seeing this, Pharaoh gave the order to attack, and the chariots of Egypt went racing after the people of God. Then God bound the axles of the chariots. The Egyptians were seized with panic; they decided to flee, but it was too late.

The Lord said to Moses, "Strike the water with your rod in the opposite direction, and the sea will come together."

He did so, and the waters came crashing down upon the Egyptians, and not one of them survived. The Ipuwer Papyrus and an inscription upon a tomb discovered on the outskirts of the city of Al-Arish confirm this account of the Bible. These relate that the last pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom of Egypt, Tiu-Tom, perished in a whirlpool while in pursuit of slaves that had rebelled. In the morning the Israelites saw their enemies dead upon the shore. Thus the great power of the Lord was revealed to them. Then they sang to Him a song of thanksgiving (which is sung to this day at the morning worship service). To the sound of cymbals, Moses' sister and all

the women danced and sang a hymn of salvation: *Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea* (Ex. 15:21).

This great miracle of God foreshadowed our salvation in Baptism. We, too, were pursued by a great enemy—Satan—but Christ (Whose image Moses bore in himself) separated the waters for us, and the Holy Spirit (which appeared then in the pillar of cloud) led us through them, and all the power of our enemy was destroyed in the sacred waves. Having received this inexpressible gift, we must spend all our life in glorification of the Savior.

## THE MIRACLES FOLLOWING THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA (Ex. 15:22–17, 16:17)

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After Pharaoh perished in the Red Sea, the people of God proceeded along the shore of the Gulf of Suez toward the south. And as Deuteronomy tells us, the Lord *went in the way before you* [the Hebrews], *to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day* (Deut. 1:33). Tradition adds that the cloud covered the camp of Israel like a tent throughout their wandering.

Skeptics consider this miracle either a myth or a description of a torch used for protection from predators, and also as a beacon for caravans, which travel by night in the East due to the heat. This opinion, however, is contradicted by Ipuwer, the aforementioned witness of the plagues of Egypt, who writes, “Behold: the fire has risen high. Its flame goes out from the enemies of the country. Works have been done that could never have been done. The king was seized by poor people. He [the king] was buried by the falcon; he lies upon [a simple] stretcher. What the pyramid concealed became empty [i.e., the tomb of the king].”<sup>85</sup> We see before us the same phenomenon described in the Bible. Pharaoh’s unusual demise while battling the people from whom the flame arose is an obvious confirmation of Scripture. The pillar of fire is not fiction, nor a torch, but a manifestation of the glory of God, a sign of His presence. Similar miracles occurred later, as well: the pillar of cloud stood over the tabernacle, and it illuminated the Temple of Solomon. The Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a light-bearing cloud upon Tabor, and this same sign of God’s presence accompanied the Savior’s Ascension.

<sup>85</sup> The “Admonitions of Ipuwer” (also known as the Ipuwer Papyrus — a document preserved in the Leiden Museum in Holland (N<sup>o</sup> I 344 recto, acquired in 1828).

After the crossing of the sea the people of God stopped in Mara, which means “bitterness.” There the prophet Moses made the bitter water sweet by placing into it a tree shown him by God—a prefiguration of the Life-giving Tree that made sweet the bitterness of our life. The place of Mara is now shown in the region of Ayun Musa, thirty-two kilometers from Suez. Incidentally, one opinion holds that this is most likely the site of the crossing, while Mara is a hot salty sulfur spring of Ain Hawara, sixty kilometers from the north shore of the Red Sea.

The next stop is Elim, where there were twenty springs and where seventy date palms grew. Today Elim is the city of El-Tor, the capital of the Egyptian province of South Sinai. Only three of the twenty brackish springs are accessible today. There are now over a thousand palms in Elim. The twenty springs are a prefiguration of the twenty apostles, and the seventy palms are a prefiguration of the seventy apostles.

After Elim the people stopped in the wilderness of Sin (the plain of el-Ka’a). There for the first time manna fell from heaven, which was also called the bread of angels, and at evening the people were fed with quail that flocked to the camp in huge numbers. The word *manna* comes from the Hebrew expression *man hu* (“what is it?”). Such was the Israelites’ exclamation when they saw this divine food upon the ground. According to Tradition the manna took on the flavor desired by the person eating it, and it fell each day except Saturday; hence, on Friday twice as much fell as usual.

The manna was not of course the product of aphids that feed off the tamarisk, as skeptics avow. In actuality the properties of manna are not like those of tamarisk sap, which is sold under the name of “angel’s bread.” The Hebrews lived for forty years on the former, whereas the latter is only suitable as a garnish. The former fell in an unusual way (on Friday enough of it fell to last two days, and on Saturday none fell at all), and in an unusual way it would rot if left for the next morning during a week day, yet remain fresh and unspoiled on Saturday. The storage of manna for centuries in a jar for grain (an *omer*) was miraculous (Ex. 16:32). It stood in the tabernacle, then in the temple, and the priests would periodically show it to the people, testifying to God’s care for them. Yet another miracle was that however much of it the Hebrews might gather, everyone always had the same amount (Ex. 16:18). Nothing of the sort occurs with tamarisk sap. It can keep for months if it is not eaten by ants. Besides, there could never have been enough of it for two or three million Israelites—only a few hundredweight of the substance is produced annually on the entire Sinai Peninsula. Thus, any attempt to equate the two foods must be discarded.

One must not think the stories of this wondrous food to be mere fairy tales. Flavius Josephus said that snow-like manna covered the earth. And Hebrew tradition relates that the manna fell from the clouds (Ps. 77:23–24) in



such great quantities that not only the people but even the animals were fed with it (otherwise there is no possible explanation for how the animals could have survived in the wilderness for forty years).

In the words of the Lord, manna, this heavenly bread, was a prefiguration of the Holy Eucharist, which preserves us in the wilderness of this life. Manna was created by God, and Communion unites us with the eternal Creator. Those who ate the manna eventually died, but those who eat the Lord's Flesh will live forever (Jn. 6:27–58).

The next camp was made in Rephidim, where Moses brought forth water from the rock (Ex. 17:1–7). The place where this miracle occurred is located on the edge of the village of Santa Caterina. As we know, no matter how you pound a flint cliff, no water will ever emerge from it. Hence, here we have an obvious witness to the Lord's miracle.

The prophet Moses himself, addressing the eyewitnesses of the miracle, says that the Lord *brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint* (Deut. 8:15). This cannot be done by any natural means. The psalms also tell us that the water flowed in a river (Ps. 104:41), forming a lake (Ps. 113:8), something a small spring formed of water seeping through limestone would be incapable of doing. Regardless, no ordinary spring could have provided enough water for all the people and their enormous herds.

The apostle Paul writes that the rock that brought forth water was a sign of Christ, Who brought forth from Himself the water of the Holy Spirit: *[All did] drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ* (1 Cor. 10:4). From this expression it follows that the apostle acknowledged that the rock did not produce water one time only, but followed the camp during their wandering in the wilderness. The apostle's words "and that Rock was Christ," not "was a prefiguration of Christ," are understood to mean that the Lord God Himself, Who became Christ in the incarnation, stood above the cliff,

In Rephidim the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites, who killed all the weak and the stragglers. Moses commanded Josiah son of Nun to lead the battle, and so that he would conquer Moses gives him the name Joshua, foretelling by this name the Great Conqueror of the devil.<sup>86</sup> The prophet himself ascended upon a mountain and prayed, lifting up his hands. When his hands lowered from weariness the Amalekites prevailed, while when he again lifted up his hands to God the Hebrews prevailed. Seeing this, Aaron and Or seated Moses upon a rock and held his hands uplifted. Thus the victory was carried by the people of God. This event itself prefigured the

<sup>86</sup> *Translator's note:* Etymologically *Joshua* and *Jesus* are the same name, and in the Hebrew and a number of other languages, including Russian and Spanish, they are spelled identically.

Crucifixion of Christ the Savior, Who lifted up His hands upon the Cross and crushed the enemy of men. On this place Moses erected an altar to God, called Jehovah Nissa (“The Lord is my standard”). *For he said, Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation* (Ex. 17:16). This is a testimony to the eternal battle between God and the spiritual Amalek—the devil—that will end on the day when God assembles all generations before Him: the Day of Judgment.

## THE APPEARANCE OF GOD ON SINAI (Ex. 19–24)

In the third month after the exodus the people of Israel approached Mount Sinai and made camp there. God gave Moses to know that in three days He Himself would appear to the people and make a Covenant with them. The people were to sanctify themselves so as not to perish due to God’s presence. Likewise, none were to approach the holy mountain until the glory of God had left its peak, and any who touched the mountain were to be stoned or shot with arrows. Thus the Lord forbids those who do not wish to cleanse their minds of sin from touching the mysteries of the Divine life.

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Three days later (it was the fiftieth day after the Passover) God descended upon Mount Sinai in fire. Thick clouds surrounded the mountain, and smoke went up from it. Fire shot up to the heavens, and the mountain shook violently. Lighting flashed on all sides, the angels accompanying the Creator sounded their trumpets, and the sounds of the trumpets grew ever louder. The people shook with terror and retreated in fear. Moses spoke with God, and He answered him with a voice. And God spoke the Ten Commandments:

1. *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*

2. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.*

3. *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.*

4. *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six*

*days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

5. *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*

6. *Thou shalt not kill.*

7. *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

8. *Thou shalt not steal.*

9. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

10. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's* (Ex. 20:2–17.)

After this God forbade worshiping idols, and established numerous other laws for the Hebrews, promising that if the people would keep their Covenant with God an angel would go before them to lead them into the promised land.

When Moses had proclaimed all God's words to the people, all the people promised to obey the words of the Lord. Moses wrote down all God's commands and erected an altar at the foot of the mountain. There the first-born young men offered sacrifice to God, and *Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words* (Ex. 24:8).

Thus the Old Testament was solemnly established between God and men, sealed with the blood of sacrifice. This blood prefigured the redeeming Blood of Christ.

After the giving of the Law, God commanded Moses, Aaron, and seventy elders to ascend upon Mount Sinai to worship God from afar. There they saw the place of God, like a cut sapphire—this is an image of the soul when it has been delivered from the passions. And they ate and drank before the Face of God, symbolizing the Sacrament of Communion.

## THE MEANING OF THE LAW

Why was the Law needed? According to the apostle Paul, it was given because of the transgressions of men. They thought them good, as they liked the way of life that they were leading. But the Creator gives a Law that shows their “righteousness” to be the fruit of self-deception, when in actuality they had departed far from the will of God.

The law became a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3). It did not permit the people to destroy themselves with sin, and protected them from self-destruction. Men's freedom was shackled, for they were still children, incapable of freely serving the Creator. The commandments kept men from sliding into the swamp of satanization, and the animal sacrifices showed that the innocent blood of the Savior must be shed, which is able to cleanse men from sin. True freedom will only enter a person when the Law of God has been written by the Holy Spirit upon the heart of each one who has believed, who like a son fulfills the will of the Heavenly Father. The need for the external observance of Moses' law then disappears, but its content remains forever. And so it happened after the death of Jesus Christ, Whose Sacrifice took the place of all the sacrifices of the Law.

### THE GOLDEN CALF (Ex. 32–34)

After the Covenant had been made, at God's command Moses ascended the mountain, where God gave him stone tablets bearing the commandments. And the cloud of God's glory covered the mountain, and the appearance of His glory upon its peak was like a consuming fire. Moses went into the midst of the cloud and was on the mountain for forty days, in the place where God was.

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Aaron and Or were left to rule the people. When the Hebrews saw that Moses was long in descending from the mountain, they went to see Aaron and demanded that he make them a god to go before them, because Moses had disappeared and his fate was unknown. Or attempted to restrain the people, but they killed him. Then Aaron commanded their wives to bring their earrings and ornaments to construct the idol, thinking they would refuse to part with them. But they gladly gave up their ornaments.

Then Aaron made them a golden calf, and they said, "Here is your god, O Israel, who led you out of Egypt. Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." In the morning the Hebrews offered sacrifices to the idol, sat down to eat and drink, and began to commit depravities.

God said to Moses, "Go down, for your people has become corrupt, having made a golden calf. Quickly have they become corrupt! This is a stiff-necked people. Leave Me, therefore, that My wrath may grow hot, and I will destroy them and bring forth from you a great nation."

But Moses begged the Lord to take pity upon the apostates for the sake of His name and for the sake of the Covenant promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then the Lord took pity upon the people at Moses' intercession.

The prophet began descending the mountain, carrying the two stone tablets inscribed with the Commandments, created by the hands of God. Along the way he was joined by Joshua, son of Nun. Upon approaching the camp they heard cries and songs.

“It is the noise of war!” exclaimed the warlike Joshua.

“No, I hear singing and dancing,” replied Moses.

They approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing Hebrews. Moses’ anger was kindled, and he broke the tablets, for the people had broken their pact with the Creator. He burned the calf with fire, ground it into dust, sprinkled it on water, and gave it to the Hebrews to drink.

And Moses stood in the gates of the camp: “Whoever is the Lord’s, come to me!”

But only the descendents of Levi came. Then Moses commanded them to execute the stubborn idol-worshippers, and three thousand men fell at their hands.

The next day Moses ascended the mountain to intercede with the Creator for the people: “O Lord, forgive them their sin! Otherwise blot me out also from Your Book into which You have written me.”

And the Lord replied, “Him who has sinned before Me will I blot out of My Book. Go and lead the people into the land flowing with milk and honey. I will send My Angel, and in the day of My visitation I will visit them. I will not go with you Myself, so as not to destroy you, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

Upon hearing this sentence the people burst into weeping and took off their ornaments as a sign of repentance. Moses erected a tent for himself outside the camp, and whoever sought the Lord went into it. Thus he prefigured Jesus Christ, Who was crucified outside the city, and through Whom we have access to the Father. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended and stood before the entrance, and God spoke with Moses face to face, as we speak to a friend. And each who saw that pillar worshiped from his tent.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TABERNACLE (Ex. 25–40)

While Moses was on the mountain God showed him a heavenly prefiguration of the Temple—an image of the universe ruled by Christ. He explained its meaning to the prophet, and commanded him to build a copy upon the earth. When Moses descended from the mountain the second time, as the Lord had commanded he ordered Bezaleel and the others to build a portable

temple—the tabernacle. The temple consisted of three parts: the courtyard, into which all the Israelites entered; the sanctuary, where the priests served; and the holy of holies, into which the high priest entered once a year. A copper altar stood in the courtyard, upon which the sacrifices offered to God were burned. This prefigured the Cross of Christ. There also stood a copper washbasin for ritual washing, which symbolized baptism. In the sanctuary a seven-branched candlestick burned, prefiguring the gifts of the Holy Spirit. An altar of incense also stood there, indicating the prayers of the saints. There also stood a table with the twelve loaves of the offering, placed in memory of the tribes of Israel and foretelling the appearance of the twelve apostles.

The holy of holies was separated from the sanctuary by a curtain, embroidered with cherubim. This curtain signified the angelic guard that keeps watch over the world and looks upon God. In the most mystical place of the tabernacle stood the Ark of the Covenant—a special box in which lay two stone slabs (tablets), upon which the Ten Commandments were written by the hand of God. Above the lid of the Ark, also overshadowed with images of the cherubim, the voice of God would sometimes come forth, revealing His will. This lid was called the “atonement piece,” for once a year the high priest would sprinkle it with blood to cleanse the sins of the people. This lid is an image of Christ the Redeemer, Who cleansed our sins. The Ark of the Covenant is a symbol of the Theotokos, adorned by the Holy Spirit, in whom God the Word became man.

When Moses had sanctified the tabernacle, the cloud of God’s glory entered into it, so that no one could go in to serve. Then the cloud of God rose up and stood above the tabernacle by day, and at night it glowed with fire. This glory of God abides invisibly in our temples to this day.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD

To serve in the tabernacle God appointed special ministers—the priests, whom He chose from the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. They were to serve the Lord, to offer Him sacrifice, to burn incense, and to explain the Law of God to the people. The chief of these was the high priest, who was robed in special garments that symbolized the entire world. The priests performed the regular services, assisted by the Levites—the descendants of Levi. They were appointed to this service by Moses, who offered a sacrifice and anointed Aaron and his children to service with fragrant sacred oil, called myrrh. For seven days after their consecration they were not to leave the sanctuary. The high priest prefigured Christ the Redeemer, Who entered

into the heavenly sanctuary with His own Blood to deliver the whole world from sin.

On the eighth day Aaron offered a sacrifice to God and blessed the people with the name of the Lord. And the glory of the Lord appeared to the people: fire went forth from the Lord and ignited the sacrifices offered upon the altar, and all the people fell upon their knees in reverent terror. But God showed Himself to be not only the source of blessing, but also a power for punishment: when Aaron's sons Nadab and Abiud entered the tabernacle, carrying fire in their censers other than that which had come down from the heavens, which was not allowed by God, fire immediately went out from the Lord and burned them up, leaving their clothing untouched (Lev. 10:1). Thus God showed that He forbids introducing the strange fire of one's own inventions and impure life into the mysteries of God.

## THE SCOUTS IN THE HOLY LAND (Num. 13–14)

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The Hebrews remained in the wilderness of Paran, in the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea. And Moses sent people to look over the land of Canaan and report on whether it was a good place to live. The scouts left Kadesh soon after the feast of Pentecost (the 28th day of the month of Sivan, or June), and returned on the 8th day of the month of Av (August). Their long journey to Rehob lasted for the duration of these forty days. This city is mentioned in the letters of El-Amarna. It is located between Lake Merom and the Litani river, from which the road leads to the city-state of Hamat.

After looking over the whole land they came to the valley of Eshcol, not far from Hebron, where they cut an enormous grape branch, so heavy that two men had to carry it on a pole. They also took pomegranates and figs. The grapes growing in the valley are of remarkable size even today, growing to the size of plums. A cluster can weigh up to 5 kilograms, and the wine from them is renowned for its unique aroma. In 1819 in Elbek (Syria) a grape cluster was grown weighing nineteen pounds, and four laborers carried it on a pole, taking turns two at a time, almost exactly as in the episode described in the book of Numbers.

In the interpretation of Saint Ephraim the Syrian, “the cluster which two bore upon a staff, hanging from the branch upon which it had grown, depicts that the prophets and apostles, as it were, bore upon themselves Emanuel. In another sense this presents to us an image of the cross, and those who bore the cluster are in image of the two thieves.”<sup>87</sup> And indeed, this cluster

<sup>87</sup> Saint Ephraim the Syrian, *Explanation of the Book of Numbers*, 13



was the pledge of the future possession of the Promised Land, and the Body of Christ is the true Grape Vine (Jn. 15:1)—the pledge for communicants of entry into the Kingdom Eternal. But from this follows a stern reminder for us Christians: nearly all the Hebrews, except for the children, perished in the wilderness and did not enter Canaan. We too, if we do not become like children in meekness and humility, risk remaining in the terrible wilderness of sin forever.

The men that returned to Moses and to all the people brought them the fruits of the earth and said, *We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great ... The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south ... The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight* (Num. 13:28–29; 30:33–34).

Indeed, archeologists have discovered numerous fortified cities dating back to that time, constructed using Cyclopean masonry, that stand on nearly every hill. One example is the excavated walls of Jericho. It is interesting to note that, according to archeological data, at the end of the middle bronze period (16th century B.C.) the cities were at the peak of their development, and may be called the largest fortifications in the history of Palestine.

The scouts' statement that the land devours those who live there is due firstly to the fact that literally several months before this the Amalakites and their allies had conquered Palestine, and the aftermath of the war was still visible. Secondly, they are describing the fact that the cataclysms of those times caused the death of many. This is also confirmed by archeological excavations that reveal ruins from that epoch that were caused by earthquakes.

References to the giants that lived there are also found in the texts of Ugarit. It may be that these "giants" were the very Neandarthals whose remains have also been discovered in Canaan. A still greater cause of fear for the Hebrews were the giants' magical abilities. One of the last giants with whom the Israelites had to contend was Goliath. He possessed tremendous physical strength, and his armor weighed over sixty kilograms. His coat of mail weighed five thousand shekels of brass and his spear weighed six hundred shekels of iron (1 Sam. 17:5–7). He was over three meters tall, and acted by the power of the pagan gods, i.e., the demons (Ps. 151). Another giant, Lahmi, had a *spear staff... like a weaver's beam* (1 Chron. 20:5), the weaver's beam being the thick beam to which the cloth is attached.

All these natural considerations ought to have yielded to trust in the Lord's word, and one of the scouts, Caleb, joined Joshua in saying that the

Lord would give them the land if the Hebrews would be faithful to Him. But the Hebrew people murmured against Moses and Aaron, fearing that they were leading them into a land where they would perish by the sword of their enemies. They decided to stone them and return to Egypt.

There is no excuse for the unbelief of the Hebrews. Not only had they seen the Lord's miracles in Egypt and the Red Sea, they now had before them the continual miracles of God's presence—the manna, the pillar of fire, the cloud that covered the camp, and the water-flowing rock that followed after the camp. All the more culpable is their fear before the very gods that had proved themselves powerless before the face of the true God.

Then the glory of the Lord appeared to the people. God said to Moses: *How long will this people provoke Me? and how long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they* (Num. 14:11–12). But Moses begged the Lord to spare the people for the sake of His own vow to bring them out. The Creator forgave them by the prayers of the prophet, but said that those who had rebelled against Him would die in the desert, and that only Caleb and Joshua, who had obeyed him, would enter the Promised Land. God's punishment thundered down upon the impious people, and fire consumed those who had troubled the people's spirit. And the Lord, citing the rebels' own words, passed sentence upon them: *As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in Mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against Me. Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know My breach of promise* (Num. 14:28–34).

But the people again decided to oppose God. Citing the Lord's previous command, they now decided to storm Palestine, and were naturally crushed. The Amalakites, allied with the Canaanites, routed the Hebrews and pursued them to the edge of a mountain top, to a place that was later called Hormah. Moses remained in the camp, not wishing to participate in an undertaking opposed to God.

There is a lesson for us in this: frequently we wish to justify acts we have committed against our conscience, to claim the approbation of this or

that authority. But the Lord does not give help to those who oppose His will, though we may attempt to bargain with our conscience.

Convinced by their own bitter experience that they could do nothing without the Lord's help, the Hebrews were obliged after all to return to the wilderness and settle in the Oasis of Kadesh-Barnea, where they spent thirty-eight years. Today this place is located on the border between Egypt and Israel.

### THE UPRISING OF KORAH, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM (Num. 16–17)

During the time of the Hebrews' sojourn in Kadesh one of the largest uprisings against Moses occurred, led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Their chief rallying cry was a demand that the priesthood be open to all. They said, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?* (Num. 16:3). As surprising as this may be, the insurgents' rallying cry is echoed to this day by Protestants, schismatics, and Muslims, who reject the divinely-established hierarchy on the pretext that "to God all men are equal." It is no surprise that nearly all revolutionaries and tyrants attempt to prove their rightness by citing the voice of the people, as if the people as a whole are incapable of sin and their will infallible. The absurdity of this idea is obvious. For no number of negatives will ever add up to a positive, and however many deluded people one may assemble no truth will ever come out of their common delusions. It is not the will of the majority that is needed in order to learn the truth, but obedience to Divine Revelation.

And here in answer to the demand of the insurgents the Lord showed His glory and power. They went down alive into hades, and the earth swallowed them up. To this day they abide there, filled with eternal emptiness. Before Christ hades was a land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land of gloom, dark as darkness itself (Job. 10:21–22). And in this gloomy place the deathless souls of the dead lead their joyless existence, self-aware and cognizant of the past. As Job said sorrowfully, *If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness* (Job. 17:13). The kings of the earth preside in hades upon transparent thrones; ancient monsters—the antediluvian giants—contemplate their crimes in a terrible half-sleep; the leaders of nations, lying upon their beds, are surrounded by their descendants. Beneath the heads of tyrants and warriors lie swords, red with the blood of their victims. All of them lie in the grave, and they have placed their swords

beneath their heads, a reminder of the savagery with which they incited terror upon the earth. They make way for new arrivals to the depths of the abyss, and at the very bottom of this terrible valley the cruelest of the sinners dwell. The souls of the damned bear their shame, and the evil spirits make sport of them (Is. 14; Ez. 32). Before us we see the terrible panorama of the hades into which Korah, Dathan, and Abiram descended. It is interesting to note that pagan legends likewise contain very similar descriptions of one's fate after death.

Another two hundred and fifty elders perished from the celestial fire. Their brass censers, sanctified by their death, were beaten into sheets, and of these sheets an altar for whole-burnt offerings was made, as a sign that no one can approach the priesthood who has not been called by the Creator. And until the very day of the Coming of the Lord—the eternal High Priest—this sign of Israel's election stood before all the tribes, first in the tabernacle, then later in the Temple of Solomon.

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A new confirmation of Aaron's ministry was the miracle of the rod that blossomed, prefiguring the virgin birth of Christ the Savior. At God's command all the tribes placed one rod from each of their elders before the Ark of the Covenant overnight, and in the morning the rod signed with Aaron's name put forth leaves, bloomed, and bore fruit (almonds). And throughout the time up to the destruction of Jerusalem the rod of Aaron was a witness to the divine election of the ancient priesthood, for it lay before the Ark of the Covenant.

This miracle prefigured both the virgin birth of the Lord and the mystery of the Cross. As a dead staff manifested an abundance of life by God's power, so also the womb of the Ever-Virgin brought forth the Eternal High Priest by the power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, a rod is barren, as the hearts of the pagans were barren, but the power of Christ's death upon the Cross has brought forth eternal life in the souls of penitent idol-worshippers.

## THE SIN OF MOSES AND AARON (Num. 20)

**T**he forty years of wandering came to an end, and Moses' sister Miriam died. At this time the Hebrews began to lack water, and a new revolt against God arose. Through God's Revelation Moses and Aaron were to bring forth water from a granite cliff, but Moses fell into anger and lack of faith, and struck the cliff with his rod twice, which the Lord had not commanded him to do. The cliff immediately produced water, but for their unbelief Moses and Aaron forfeit their chance to enter into the Promised Land. Here we

see that the closer a person is to God, the more responsible he is for his sins, and that what would have been forgivable for some people prevents one who spoke with God face to face from seeing his dream realized. To many of us it seems that if a person is holy everything is permitted him, but Scripture says the reverse: to whom much is given, from him much shall be required.

The spring Moses brought forth exists to this day. Moses “struck twice, and two new springs broke through, which flow to this day.”<sup>88</sup>

God commanded Aaron to ascend the mountain, there to die for his disobedience. Aaron submitted to God’s will, and ascended Mount Or (now called Jebel Harun, near the city of Petra). Moses removed all his sacred vestments and robed his son Eleazar in them. And Aaron, Moses’ brother, died. On the peak of this mountain to this day the grave of the first high priest may be seen. Today it is merely a white building, but it is built on the ruins of a beautiful Christian temple.

The prophet Aaron and his sister Miriam are commemorated on the Synaxis of the Saints of Sinai on Bright Wednesday, and on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers.

## THE BRASS SERPENT (Num. 21)

Soon after the death of Aaron a new rebellion of the Israelites began. Once again they began to say, *Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread* (Num. 21:5). Immediately God’s punishment came down upon the insurgents: numerous poisonous snakes, called seraph snakes (seraph meaning “fiery”), attacked them.

Then at Moses’ prayer the Lord sent salvation upon those who trusted Him. He commanded that a brass snake be made and raised upon a standard, so that by looking upon it anyone who had been bitten by a serpent might remain alive. In the words of Christ the Savior, it was not the brass snake that saved, but the fact that it served as a prefiguration of the Crucifixion: *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life* (Jn. 3:14–15).

“But how can a snake be an image of Christ?” some will ask. The answer is given by Saint Gregory the Theologian, who says that “that brazen serpent was hung up as a remedy for the biting serpents, not as a type of Him

<sup>88</sup> Henry Halley, *Halley’s Bible Handbook*, Saint Petersburg, 1996

that suffered for us, but as a contrast; and it saved those that looked upon it, not because they believed it to live, but because it was killed, and killed with it the powers that were subject to it, being destroyed as it deserved. And what is the fitting epitaph for it from us? *O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, where is your victory?*<sup>89</sup> (1 Cor. 15:55). You are overthrown by the Cross; you are slain by Him who is the Giver of life; you are without breath, dead, without motion, even though you keep the form of a serpent lifted up on high on a pole.”<sup>90</sup>

Not long ago archeological proof of this account from the book of Numbers was discovered. In Timna, not far from Eilat, beside the ruins of an ancient brass mine, an image of a brass snake with a gold head five inches long (12.5 cm) was found. Beside it were found the remnants of a portable tent—the sanctuary, the dimensions of which match those described in the book of Exodus. Archeologist Beno Rothenberg discovered not only openings for the poles upon which the tent was stretched, but also remnants of the cloth from the curtain.<sup>91</sup> It is most likely that this sanctuary belonged to the Midianites, who copied it from the Hebrews.

### BALAAM THE SEER (Num. 21–24)

After the punishment of the Israelite people by the snakes, at God’s command Moses again works the miracle of bringing forth water. Then Israel sang the song: *Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah* (Num. 21:17–18). It is no accident that the Pentateuch ascribes such importance to wells, for the living spring water in Scripture is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:37–39). Then God gives the “reformed” Hebrews the victory over two great Canaanite kings: Sihon of Ammorea and Og of Basan. These kings themselves were no ordinary men, but giants, possessed by evil spirits. The length of the iron bed of Og, for example, was 9 cubits (4.95 meters), and its width was 4 cubits (2.2 meters; Deut. 3:11). Incidentally, the basalt dolmen found beside Amman corresponds perfectly to the biblical description.

But no occult craft or physical abilities were of any use to the Amorites. During the battle with the Hebrews they were attacked by hornets, and they

<sup>89</sup> *Translator’s note:* This passage is also rendered thus: “O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?”

<sup>90</sup> Saint Gregory the Theologian, Homily 45, On Holy Pascha

<sup>91</sup> Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*. Moscow, 1998

fled and perished. Flavius Josephus adds further detail to what is described in Holy Scripture. According to his account, Sihon created defensive embankments along the Arnon, but when he saw the armies of the Hebrews terror suddenly swept over him, and in a panic his forces fled, hoping to hide in the cities. They did not reach them, however, for a terrible thirst suddenly came over them, due to which all the Amorites were routed at a watering hole.

Then Balak, king of Moab, invited the renowned seer Balaam, son of Beor, from Mesopotamia, to come and curse Israel. This person occupies a strange place in Sacred History. On the one hand he is a sorcerer who uses birds to foretell the future, but on the other hand he hears the commands of the Lord, and his spiritual eye is opened. No less strange is his behavior toward the emissaries of the king of Moab. On the one hand he says that if Balak will give him an entire house of gold, yet God forbids him, he will not go, but on the other hand he quite obviously wishes to violate the clearly expressed will of God. He asks that he be permitted to go to Balak, and as a result the miracle of the ass that spoke occurs. When Balaam left his country upon an ass, several times the Angel of the Lord appeared and stood in his path, and after several attempts to go around something that was invisible to the man, but was visible to the beast, the ass lay down. When Balaam began to beat it, by God's will the ass spoke with a human voice, saying that an angel was present here. At this the seer too saw the celestial messenger, who commanded him to speak only the words of God and not attempt to conjure against the people of God.

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This remarkable person comes to Mount Pisgah and fulfills God's command to bless Israel and not curse it. In a fury Barak, king of Moab, refuses him his payment. By the lips of Balaam the Spirit of God foretold the Coming of Christ: *I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth* (Num. 24:17). It was on the basis of this prophecy that the disciples of Balaam, the magi, came to worship the newborn Divine Infant one and a half millennia later. This prophecy is read in the churches on the eve of the Nativity.

But even this clear intervention by the Creator does not induce Balaam to fully become a believer. He advised Balak *to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication* (Rev. 2:14), and he was killed in the battle with the Midianites.

Incredibly, in 1967 a Dutch archeological expedition in Jordania discovered an inscription of Balaam, son of Beor, on the site of Tell Deir 'Alla. It consists of pieces of plaster inscribed with ink, which are now in the Amman Archeological Museum. These mention the miracles in Egypt, and there is an allusion to Balaam's impious counsel.



## THE ANOINTING OF JOSHUA, SON OF NUN (Num. 27:12–23)

**T**he prophet Moses lost his hope of entering the Promised Land, but God nevertheless showed His friend a great honor. As Saint Ephraim the Syrian writes, “God humbled Moses in not permitting him to lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land, but He exalts him in making Joshua, to whom He gives preference over Moses, to be to him as a servant. For Moses, as one greater than Joshua, was to fortify him.”<sup>92</sup>

At the Lord’s command Moses lays hands upon Joshua, imparting to him of his glory (Num. 27:12–23). This rite was a prefiguration of the sacrament of the priesthood, where through the laying-on of hands a person receives the power to rule the people of God. Great were the gifts relayed to Joshua, yet they were less than those possessed by Moses, who spoke with God face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11). Joshua did not have the gift of prophecy, and had to rule the people with the help of the priests, receiving Revelation through the Urim and Thummim—two special stones in the priest’s vestments. This distinction was given by God to show that it is impossible to achieve perfect communion with God in the Old Testament, until one would come who, like Moses, would be both prophet and king, and, unlike Moses, would lead the people of God into the eternal Fatherland.

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## THE REBELLION AT MOUNT PHEGOR (Num. 25, 31)

**I**n leaving, Balaam advised the king of Moab to corrupt the Israelites with fornication, and through this to deprive them of their divine protection. And so it came to pass. The Hebrews began to fornicate with the Moabite women and to participate with them in worshipping Baalpeor. This was ritual debauchery, through which a person communed with the demons. The wrath of God immediately came down upon the apostates, and a plague ensued.

At God’s command Moses ordered that all the idol-worshippers be executed. At the very moment when those faithful to the Creator were weeping over having angered God, one of the captains of the tribe of Simeon brazenly brought a harlot into his home. Then Aaron’s grandson, Phinehas, seized a spear and drove it through them both, and the plague immediately ceased. And God said, *Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath*

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<sup>92</sup> Saint Ephraim the Syrian, *Explanation of the Book of Numbers*.

*turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel* (Num. 25:11–13). And indeed, Phinehas and his descendants became high priests in the house of God.

Twenty-three thousand people perished from the plague, and a thousand were executed. At the Lord's command Moses ordered that the corrupters be destroyed. Among them Balaam also perished, to whom God's Revelation had been given, but who had turned away to the path of evil. Citing this account, the apostle Paul warns: *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand ... Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come* (1 Cor. 10:8, 11).

## THE DEATH OF MOSES THE GOD-SEER

(Deut. 34)

When the Hebrews reached the borders of the Holy Land, God told Moses that the time had come for him to die, in punishment for not having precisely fulfilled the Lord's command at the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:7–13). As Moses approached the Jordan he repeated all the commandments the Lord had given at Mount Sinai, that the children of those who died wandering in the wilderness might remember all God's wonders and fulfill His commandments. This final speech of the God-seer, which he wrote down, is called the book of Deuteronomy.

This book contains one of the most important prophecies concerning Christ the Savior. Moses says, *And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him* (Deut. 18:17–19). The Lord Jesus Christ, born from among the Hebrews, indeed became a Prophet like unto Moses. As Moses was persecuted at his birth, so also Herod wanted to kill Christ. As Moses led the people out of Egyptian slavery, so also Christ freed all men from slavery to the devil. As Moses concluded the Old Testament between God and men, so also Christ concluded the New Testament between His Father and the Church. Moses

gave the Law to slaves, while the Lord gave the Law of freedom. Moses' face shone when he descended from the mountain; Jesus Christ shone when He was transfigured on Tabor. Hence, the apostles also apply this prophecy directly to the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 3:20–24). This is important to remember, considering that the Muslims falsely apply this prophecy to Mohammed.

Upon completing his prophecies Moses blessed those who kept the Law, and cursed those who would break the Covenant with the Creator. These blessings and curses proved prophetic, as they are fulfilled precisely in the Hebrew nation to this day (Deut. 28–30).

In speaking these predictions, at God's command Moses appointed Joshua the son of Nun as his successor, and in conclusion spoke a hymn of denunciation against apostates, which resounds as a warning to all men unto all generations (Deut. 32). It is sung in our churches each Tuesday of Great Lent, and forms the basis for the second odes of the canons.

Having spoken his final prophecies, Moses blesses all the tribes of Israel, foretelling the lot of each (Deut. 33), and at the Lord's word he ascends Mount Nebo, there to see the land which he will not be able to enter. Having gazed upon the sight of his future fatherland, Moses, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of 120, according to the word of the Lord. *And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day* (Deut. 34:6). This occurred on the first of Adar (February–March).

According to a tradition reflected in the epistle of the apostle Jude, the devil argued with the archangel Michael, the protector of the Hebrew people, over the body of Moses, wishing to deliver it to the Israelites so that they would make an idol of it. But the captain of the Lord's hosts said, *The Lord rebuke thee* (Jude 1:9).

This did not mark the end of the fate of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, however. He did enter Palestine, in the days of Christ the Savior, when Christ called him forth from hades and vouchsafed him to see the glory of God face to face. On Tabor Moses appeared in glory and conversed with the Lord *of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem* (Lk. 9:30–31). Thus God fulfilled the prophet's prayer that he be granted to see the face of the Creator and to enter into the Promised Land.

## THE SPIES IN JERICHO (Josh. 1–2)

When Moses had gone to his fathers, God commanded Joshua to begin the conquest of the Holy Land, saying, "I will not depart from you and will not forsake you. Be firm and courageous. Only be very courageous and take care

to preserve and fulfill the whole Law given to Moses. Do not depart from it either to the right or to the left. Exercise yourself in it day and night, and fulfill precisely what is written. Then none will be able to withstand you. Fear nothing, for the Lord God is with you.”

At Joshua's command all the people began to prepare to cross the Jordan. To the nearby city of Jericho, which they were to conquer, two spies were sent on before them. They went into the city and stayed in the home of Rahab the harlot. The king of the city learned of this and commanded that the men be handed over to him, but Rahab hid the spies in the roof of her house, covering them with sheaves of flax.

When the king's messengers had gone, the mistress said, “I know that God has given the whole earth over to you. All the inhabitants of this country fear your people, because they have heard of the great wonders of God in Egypt. But as I have saved you, save me and my family.”

The spies promised to save the lives of Rahab's family if she would tie a scarlet cord to the window; all that wished to be saved were to be gathered in her home. Whoever went outside would perish. This Rahab promised to do. Her house abutted the city wall (such homes have been discovered in excavations of the ruins of Jericho), and she let the spies down by a rope. They reported everything to Joshua, and Rahab immediately hung a red rope from her window.

Rahab the harlot is a symbol of the church of the gentiles. The gentiles apostatized from the Creator and worshiped the demons, but they rejected faith in their false gods for the sake of the true God. Their deliverance was the Blood of Christ, symbolized by the scarlet cord. The home of Rahab, the only one where one could be saved in Jericho, signified the one Church, outside which one cannot be saved from eternal destruction.

## THE STORM OF JERICHO (Josh. 3–6)

Joshua gave the order to begin the assault. But the Israelites found themselves facing the seasonally flooded banks of the Jordan. At the command of God the people approached the river, and the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant entered the roiling waters. And a miracle occurred: further upstream of the Jordan the water suddenly stopped, and the people crossed the river on dry land. At Joshua's command twelve stones were brought from the bottom, and in their place twelve other stones were set, as a witness to the miracle that had taken place. The moment the priest's feet left the river bed the water immediately came rushing down. This sign indicated that God had not left Israel after Moses' death, and prefigured baptism, through

which men, led by Jesus Christ, ascend to heaven. It is no accident that the Lord's Baptism occurred precisely in this place, and the twelve stones taken from the river symbolize the twelve apostles, upon whom the New Israel, the Church of God, was built. This event occurred on the 10th day of the month of Abib (March).

Then Joshua circumcised all the Hebrews who had been born in the wilderness, and freed them from the shame of slavery. So also baptism cuts from our hearts the growths of sin and death to which we were enslaved. After this, the feast of the Passover was celebrated in the Holy Land for the first time. The Hebrews tasted the fruits of Canaan, and on that day the manna ceased to fall. So also Holy Communion accompanies us all the way to the Kingdom of God, but beyond the boundaries of this world we will be united with the Lord without veils.

When their forces approached Jericho, Joshua saw the archangel Michael coming to help him. The city barred its gates in fear before the Hebrews, who at the Creator's command marched around it for six days, trumpeting their trumpets (as a sign of the preaching of the Gospel, which will resound right up until the destruction of the evil of the world). On the seventh day they marched around Jericho seven times to the sound of trumpets; the whole Hebrew nation cried out with a loud voice, and the walls of the city collapsed. All the inhabitants of Jericho were wiped out by the Lord's command, and all their property destroyed, so that the Hebrews would understand that they were doing God's work. Only Rahab and her family were preserved, and they joined the people of God. (Rahab even entered the generation of Christ, as a pledge of the conversion of the pagans.)

In the 20th century the collapsed, charred walls of Jericho were discovered by archeologists.

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## THE BATTLE AT GIBEON AND THE CONQUEST OF THE HOLY LAND (Josh. 8–22)

The next battle of Joshua son of Nun was the taking of Ai. For the assault a military ruse was employed: a part of the Hebrews fled from the Canaanites, who pursued the retreating forces. Then those waiting in ambush took the city. All the inhabitants were destroyed, and the city fell to the Israelites.

After this Joshua fulfilled the will of the Lord: on Mount Ebal he built an altar, and the whole nation proclaimed a curse upon apostates and a blessing upon those who keep the Covenant with God. In the 1970s archeologists found the very altar that Joshua built.

All the kings of Canaan joined in a military alliance so as to destroy the Hebrews, and only the inhabitants of Gibeon decided to ally themselves with Israel as a ruse. The commanders of the Israelite nation were deceived, and without asking the Lord's counsel made peace with them. But soon the deception was discovered, and in punishment the inhabitants of Gibeon began chopping wood and carrying water for everyone and for the altar of the Lord.

Upon learning of the action of the inhabitants of Gibeon, the Canaanites decided to punish them, but the Gibeonites turned to Joshua for help, and he and his people launched a surprise attack upon the allied army of Canaan. This was a memorable conflict, in which the fate of the Hebrew nation hung in the balance. The Canaanites were seized with panic when the Hebrew forces attacked them, and God Himself intervened in the conflict: large stones began falling from heaven, killing the majority of the Canaanites. The battle was at its peak, but the sun was already beginning to set. Then Joshua cried out the Lord and said, *Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon* (Josh. 10:12). And the sun stood still, and the moon stood for nearly an entire day, until the people had wreaked the Lord's vengeance. The Canaanites were routed, and the five kings hid in a cave. They were found there, however, and Joshua commanded that they be cast down at the feet of the conquerors, and he ordered the military commanders to step upon their necks: *Fear not, nor be dismayed ... for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight* (Josh. 10:25).

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The five kings were executed, and numerous stones were heaped upon their bodies. Joshua attacked the superior forces of the Canaanites near Lake Merom and crushed them. He destroyed the war chariots of the Canaanites and burned Hazor, the capital of Northern Canaan. Joshua's march on South Canaan was likewise victorious, where he destroyed the giants that lived there. The ruins of the cities Joshua destroyed were also found in the 20th century, confirming the scriptural account.

After this the land was divided by lot among the tribes of Israel, and cities were set aside for the priests. Some of the cities became cities of sanctuary, where accidental murderers could take refuge. At the Lord's command the priests and the Levites were to live on the tithe (a tenth part of one's income) that the Israelites brought them, and they in turn would pray to God for the people, teaching them the Law of God and meting out justice.

According to God's Law land cannot be private property, but is rather given to people for their domain. Hence, lots were drawn, so as to show the direct action of the Creator.

Thus the Lord God fulfilled what He had promised, and gave the Promised Land to the Hebrews.

## THE REPOSE OF JOSHUA SON OF NUN (Josh. 22–24)

At the end of the holy war Joshua withdrew to the domains beyond Jordan of the people of the tribe of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manassah, commanding them to keep the Lord's Commandments. They crossed the river and erected a symbolical altar as a sign that they were part of the united people of God. The military commander himself was given a city for his domain at his request.

Finally, sensing his approaching death, Joshua gathered all the Israelites to Shechem, where the tabernacle was. There he said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Beyond the river your fathers lived and served other gods, but I led your father Abraham out and brought him into this land. His grandson Jacob settled in Egypt. But I brought you out from there. And I gave this land to you for your domain, sending hornets before you, who devoured the Canaanites, and wild beasts attacked them. And now you live in houses that you did not build, and drink from wells that you did not dig.' Fear the Lord therefore, and serve Him in purity and sincerity. If you do not wish to serve Him, choose other gods for yourselves, but my children and I will serve Him, for He is holy."

And the people answered, "No, we will serve the Lord alone. For He has driven away from us our enemies who lived in this land."

Joshua said that if they were prepared to serve the Lord they must cast away idols, because God would not endure duality of faith, and then His anger would be kindled. They reaffirmed their decision. Then Joshua made a covenant with the people, read the Pentateuch, and wrote into it all that had occurred during the time of the conquest. Then he took a huge stone and placed it beside an oak, near the sanctuary, as a witness to the covenant. If the people broke the covenant, the stone would be their accusation.

Having dismissed the people, each to his own domain, Joshua the son of Nun died in the city of Timnathserah, and they buried him with the stone knives with which he had circumcised the Hebrews near Jericho.

## THE TIME OF THE JUDGES

After Joshua's death Israel did not keep God's commands, mixed with the Canaanites, and began worshiping idols. It was for this reason that the Lord did not drive the Canaanites out of the Holy Land, that they might serve as a test for the Hebrews. When the Israelites fell into the snare of idol worship, the Creator sent aggressors against them to oppress them. But each time when the people turned to God with repentance He would raise up people for



them to deliver them from their enemies. These were the judges. The judges' task was not only to restore justice among men, but most importantly to restore the worship of God which had been violated. Their ministry itself was not linked to any source of any human trait: one could not become a judge hereditarily, nor was there any social status by which a person could merit the title. The Lord Himself would fill a person with His Spirit, and through him would work His will.

The Bible lists the following judges of Israel:

1. Othniel
2. Ehud
3. Shamgar
4. Deborah and Barak
5. Gideon
6. Tola
7. Jair
8. Jephthah
9. Ibzan
10. Elon
11. Abdon
12. Samson
13. The prophet Samuel

Some of these were particularly renowned for their feats, which we will describe below. Others merely carried out the will of God. Despite their efforts, however, Israel did not wish to renounce its false gods altogether. Furthermore, indications of moral degradation began to surface among the apostates, and some established their own centers for idol worship, while others fell into terrible debauchery. Only the efforts of those faithful to God kept the Hebrew nation from going over the brink.

### DEBORAH AND BARAK (Judg. 4–5)

**B**ecause the Hebrews began imitating the pagans in their iniquities, God gave them over to Canaanite rule. Jabin, king of Hazor, oppressed them cruelly. Then in their sufferings the Israelites cried out to God, and he sent the prophetess Deborah to aid them. She invited Barak to her, and relayed to him God's decree: "Go with ten thousand men to Mount Tabor. There I will bring Sisera, Jabin's military commander, and will give him into your hands."

But Barak refused to go unless Deborah went with him. She replied that she would go, but that for his lack of faith the honor of the victory would go not to him, but to a woman. When Barak ascended the mountain, Sisera came

to the mountain with his terrible iron chariots. At God's command Barak suddenly fell upon Sisera, and the Kishon river that flowed below suddenly filled with water, so that the chariots were stuck in the mire. Meteorites fell from heaven, killing the Canaanites. Sisera ran on foot to the tent of a man whose wife, Jael, killed him there through deception. Giving thanks to the Creator, Deborah sang a hymn of joy, crying out: *So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might* (Judg. 5:31)

According to the Orthodox interpretation, Deborah is a prefiguration of the Church, which guides a Christian to do battle with the spiritual Sisera, i.e., the devil. If a Christian makes every effort, God will miraculously grant him victory over his enemies. Jael is an image of the Theotokos, whose humility crushed the head of Satan. This is why the intercession of the Mother of God for us before the Lord is our most powerful weapon in our struggle against Satan.

## GIDEON (Judg. 6–8)

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A new generation came, and the Hebrews again departed from God and began worshipping Baal. Then God gave them over into the hands of the Midianites, who destroyed all their possessions. The Israelites cried out to God, and He took pity upon them. The Angel of God went to a man named Gideon, as he was hiding wheat from the approaching hordes of Midianites.

The angel said to him, "Go, save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. I am sending you."

"How will I save Israel," Gideon objected, "when I am the youngest of my father's house, and my tribe is the poorest?"

"I will be with you, and you will rout your enemies," the Lord replied.

Then Gideon began to ask God for confirmation of his ministry. He brought food and offered it to the angel, but the angel commanded him to pour out the pottage and to place the meat and unleavened bread upon a stone. When Gideon had done so, the angel touched the food with the end of his staff. Fire came out of the rock and burned up the offering, and the angel disappeared. Gideon feared that he would die, but the Lord calmed him, because God Himself had appeared to Gideon in the guise of an angel.

At God's command Gideon destroyed the idol of Baal by night and erected an altar to God. The inhabitants were infuriated by Gideon's act, but his father said, "If Baal is God, let him defend himself."

The hordes of the invaders attacked once again. Then, seized by the Spirit of God, Gideon sent runners to the Hebrew tribes, and they gathered to meet him. Gideon still doubted that he would be able to conquer, and twice he asked God for a sign. He spread a fleece upon a threshing floor and asked

that the dew fall only on the fleece, while all the ground remained dry. So it occurred: all around it was dry, but from the fleece Gideon wrung a cup of water. He asked a second time that dew be upon all the ground, while the fleece remained dry. And God did so: the fleece remained dry, while all the ground was covered with dew.

According to the interpretation of the fathers of the Church, the dew that descended upon the fleece signified the Theotokos, who received the Son of God into her womb.<sup>93</sup> This miracle likewise showed the ways of Divine economy: prior to the Divine Incarnation the whole earth was deprived of the Spirit of God, and grace abode upon Israel alone. But after the Divine Incarnation all the nations received the gift of grace through Christ, and only Israel, which rejected the Messiah, was left without grace. Gideon assembled all the people, and there were thirty-two thousand men with him.<sup>94</sup> God said, *The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me* (Judg. 7:2). Then Gideon sent away all the weak and cowardly, and ten thousand men were left. But God said this also was too many. At the Lord's command Gideon led the troops to water and commanded them to drink. All knelt to drink, still holding their weapons in their hands, but three hundred laid their weapons upon the ground and drank from their palms. These, the most negligent of the lot, God commanded Gideon to take with him, so that the power of God might be made obvious. They took trumpets and food from the people and went to the camp of the Midianites, of whom there was a countless multitude. Gideon split his forces into three divisions, passed out trumpets to all, and commanded them to carry lamps in pitchers. Late at night they surrounded the camp, and at Gideon's signal they broke their pitchers. All held their lamps, blew their trumpets, and cried, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" Panic swept the camp: the enemies began to kill one another, while Gideon's division merely stood and trumpeted. All the surviving Midianites fled, and then Gideon's divisions attacked and destroyed them. Thus the Lord showed that He gives victory to the humble, not to the strong.

### SAMSON (Judg. 13–16)

One of the greatest judges of Israel was Samson. At that time God had punished the Hebrews for idol worship by an invasion of Philistines. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the judge's future parents, and commanded the

<sup>93</sup> Saint Demetrius of Rostov, *The Bedewed Fleece*

<sup>94</sup> Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, *Explanation of Select Difficult Passages of Divine Scriptures: Explanation of the Book of Judges*

wife to eat nothing impure and drink no wine: her son would be a Nazarite of God, and would save Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Samson's father, Manoah, asked the Angel to reveal His name that he might glorify Him, but He answered, "Why do you ask concerning My name? It is wondrous." Thus He showed that God's essence is incomprehensible for the human mind, for it was Christ who appeared in the form of an angel.

At His command Manoah offered a sacrifice, and the Angel rose up to the heavens in the flame of the sacrifice. The spouses were terrified, but God fulfilled His promise, and the Spirit of the Lord began to act in the infant Samson, giving him superhuman strength.

When Samson grew up he decided to marry a Philistine woman. Along the way to see his fiancée Samson killed a lion, and when he returned he found a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, which had already produced honey. This miracle symbolized the mystery of Christ, who killed the monster of death upon the Cross, and from the empty tomb appeared the honey of incorruption for the people.

At his wedding Samson asked a riddle: "Out of the eater came forth what is eaten, and out of the strong came forth what is sweet."

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For a long time the Philistines puzzled over the riddle, until Samson's wife secretly told them what it meant. In anger Samson left the marriage feast, at which his wife married a friend of his. Upon learning of this, Samson began a guerilla war against the Philistines. He caught three hundred foxes, tied lighted torches to their tails, and set them loose, and they burned the fields of the Philistines. Then the Philistines undertook a retaliatory mission to arrest Samson, and the Hebrews turned the hero over to them, binding him with new ropes. When he was brought to the Philistines, Samson was seized by the Holy Spirit, and the ropes fell from his arms. He seized the jawbone of an ass, and with it killed a thousand men. Having done so Samson began to boast of his prowess, but immediately he was seized with a terrible thirst, and he understood that without God's help he was nothing. Then he asked the Creator for help, and immediately a spring of water was revealed, which revived his spirit. This miracle prefigured the great victory of Christ over the ancient enemy—the devil—when He defeated him with the cross, which was once an unclean instrument of death, but is now the source of eternal life.

Samson did not long remain at the height to which God had summoned him, however; he was seduced by the passion of fornication. Once he went to a harlot in the city of Gaza. An attempt was made to seize him by night, but Samson broke down the city gates and carried them to a hill. All were afraid to molest him, so tremendous was the power he possessed.

Then Samson fell in love with Delilah, a Philistine woman. She promised the Philistines to learn from him the secret of his power, and Samson revealed to her that he had been a Nazarite from his mother's womb, that the

Nazarites did not cut their hair, and that his strength lay in his hair. Then Delilah lulled him to sleep and cut off his hair, and the Holy Spirit deserted Samson in punishment for his fornication. The Philistines seized the hero and blinded him, put him on a chain, and forced him to turn a millstone.

Over time his hair began to grow back, and Samson understood why God had left him. The rulers of the Philistines gathered to offer sacrifice to the idol Jagon, saying, “Our god has given our enemy over into our hands.” They decided to humiliate the blind man even more, and led him to the pagan temple of Dagon, beating him and laughing at him. Samson asked his guide to lead him to the two support pillars of the temple, and Samson cried out with a loud voice to the Lord: *O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes* (Judg. 16:28).

And Samson shifted the two pillars upon which the house stood, and cried out, “Die, O my soul, with the Philistines!”

And the house collapsed, crushing all who were in it, rulers, priests, and people—over three thousand people. Thus, by his very death Samson killed more enemies than he had during his life.

Samson’s example warns us against the temptation to sin, confident in God’s gifts. Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus writes, “How much more difficult is the fight against lust than feats of military valor! One who was so valiantly courageous, renowned for his marvelous feats, became the prisoner of sensual pleasure.”<sup>95</sup>

## RUTH

During the reign of the judges God brought a famine upon Israel for their sins. Then a certain man and his family moved from Bethlehem to the country of Moab beyond Jordan. There the father of the family died, and his two sons married pagan women. Soon the sons died also, however, leaving only his widow, named Naomi, and her daughters-in-law alive. The famine in Israel ended, and she decided to return home. When she neared her country she asked her daughters-in-law to return to their people. One of them went back, to her gods, but the other, whose name was Ruth, refused, saying, “I will go with you! Your people will be my people, and your God my God.”

This was a tremendous act of faith on the part of Ruth, who rejected her fatherland and her people for the sake of the Creator, and was not afraid to go with her who had been considered accursed to a strange place.

Together they came to Bethlehem not long before the feast of the Passover. The time of the harvest arrived, and Ruth went to gather the ears left

<sup>95</sup> Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, *Explanation of the Book of Judges*.





after the wheat had been garnered. Divine Providence led her to the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi. He learned that this Moabite woman had left everything for the sake of her mother-in-law, and he ordered her to gather ears of wheat only in his field: *The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under Whose wings thou art come to trust* (Ruth 2:12).

During supper Boaz invited Ruth to eat his bread with him and to dip it in vinegar. Upon learning of this Naomi told her that Boaz was her relative, and advised Ruth to ask him to take her as his wife (according to the law the wife of a man who died childless was to be taken by her relative, to restore descendants to him).

This she did. Upon learning of this decision, Boaz said, “Blessed of the Lord are you! This affair is even better than the first. You have not sought young men, or rich, or poor, in order to fulfill the will of God.”

The next day Boaz took Ruth as his wife, so as to keep the parcel of land in Naomi’s family. And all the people and the elders blessed her, wishing her to become like Rachel and Leah, the progenitors of the nation of Israel.

And the Lord granted Ruth to bear a son of Boaz, who was named Obed (“He who worships”). Naomi nursed him, and the other women said to her, *Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him* (Ruth 4:14–15).

Obed was the grandfather of David, and in this manner Ruth entered the genealogy of Christ the Savior, which is mentioned in the beginning of the Gospel (Mt. 1:5).

Ruth is an image of the Church of the gentiles, who left their false gods and earthly fatherland out of love for Christ. She partakes of the Bread of Christ—Holy Communion—and participates in His sufferings (drinks His vinegar). She chooses the poverty of Christ so as to enter into kinship with the Heavenly Father; she does not fear to boldly disdain earthly proprieties so as to obtain the Lord, and hence the Lord is not ashamed to take her as His eternal Bride.

## THE PROPHET SAMUEL (1 Sam. 1–7)

The last judge of Israel was the prophet Samuel. His very birth was the fruit of the prayer of the prophet’s father, Elkanah, who had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was his favorite, but was barren, while Peninnah had children and mistreated Hannah.



Once they came to the tabernacle to offer sacrifice to God. Hannah stood at the entrance to the tabernacle, weeping bitterly and praying to God: "O Lord, Almighty Sabaoth! If You will look upon my prayer and give me a boy, I will give him to You as a gift all the days of his life, and he will not drink wine, and the razor will not touch his head."

She prayed silently, only her lips moving, and the high priest Eli thought she was drunk. But Hannah answered, "I am not drunk, but sorrowful in spirit, and am pouring out my soul before the Lord."

Then the high priest blessed her. Hannah returned to her home and became pregnant. When Samuel was born, after he turned three Hannah kept her promise and consecrated him to God. She said to Elias, "Here is the boy for whom I asked God, and He fulfilled my prayer."

And Hannah prayed to God and said, "My strength is exalted in my God, and my mouth has been opened wide, for I rejoice in Your salvation. None is holy but the Lord; there is no firmament like our God. He crushes the strength of the arrogant, makes the sated to work for their bread, and feeds the hungry. Even the barren woman gives birth seven times, and the mother of many children grows feeble. The Lord kills and restores to life, thrusts down to hades and raises up. He preserves the footsteps of the saints, while the iniquitous disappear in darkness, for man is not mighty in strength. The Lord will crush those who quarrel with Him, He will judge the ends of the earth, and will give strength to His King, and will exalt the strength of His Christ."

The Church sees in the story of Hannah and Peninnah a prefiguration of God's rejection of Israel and the choosing of the Church from among the gentiles, which before was barren, but now brings forth a multitude of children to the Creator. It is no coincidence that it is Hannah who was exalted to prophecy concerning the Coming of Christ, the Savior and Judge, Who will give victory to His saints over hades and death.

Samuel served in the tabernacle during Eli's service as high priest. The sons of the high priest who served in the tabernacle, however, were iniquitous. They stole the sacrifices, committed debauchery, and violated the Law of God on numerous occasions.

Their father attempted to admonish them, saying, "You are corrupting the people of God. If one person sins against another, others will pray for him to God, but if he sins against the Lord who will be his intercessor?"

But they did not heed him, and at last the Lord resolved to give them over to death. They did not heed the prophet who accused them, either, and their father did not wish to punish his sons, and for this the wrath of God overtook him as well.

Once the youth Samuel was sleeping in the tabernacle not far from the ark, and the lamp of God had not yet gone out.

Suddenly a voice called him: "Samuel! Samuel!"

The youth ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

But he answered that he had not called him. This occurred three times. Then Eli understood that God was calling Samuel, and he said, “Lie down, and when He Who is calling calls you, say to Him, ‘Speak, Lord, for Thy servant hears Thee.’”

And so it happened. And God came and said, “I will work a work in Israel such that both ears of whoever hears of it will ring. I will punish Eli and his sons, as I promised. I will begin and I will end. The sin of Eli, who did not restrain them, no sacrifices will be able to erase.”

In the morning Samuel related the Lord’s will to Eli, and this prediction came to pass. A war began between the Hebrews and the Philistines, and the sons of Eli brought the Ark of the Covenant, hoping that the shrine would protect the people on its own, without their repentance. But God rejected His people because of the sins of the priests, and the Hebrews were crushed. The sons of Eli were killed, the Ark was seized, and upon learning of this the high priest fell from his seat, broke his back, and died.

The Philistines took the Ark and bore it triumphantly into the temple of Dagon, thinking that their idol had proven stronger than God. But when they entered the temple in the morning they saw the idol lying prostrate before the Ark. The idol was raised back into place, but the next day they found it dismembered. Thus the Philistines were convinced that Dagon was by no means stronger than the God of Israel.

In the meantime misfortunes came upon their country: the people began to be covered with growths, and mice infested the whole region. The pagan priests advised the rulers not to anger God further and to send the Ark to Israel. To test whether the misfortunes were from God they placed the Ark upon a cart and hitched it to two cows that had just calved. Instead of running to their calves the cows went toward Judea, lowing as they walked, but not turning back. Thus the Ark returned to the Hebrews.

In Israel after Eli’s death Samuel became judge. He relayed the will of God to all the people, fought against idolatry, and successfully contended with their enemies.

## SAUL, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL (1 Sam. 8–15)

When Samuel grew old the people began to demand a king such as other nations had. The Hebrews did not wish God to rule them directly. Samuel warned them against the idea, but they were adamant. And God said to the prophet, “Do according to their word, for it is not you they have rejected, but Me, that I should no longer rule over them.”

Then Samuel told the Hebrews that the Lord would give them the king they had requested. Soon the mighty warrior Saul came to them, seeking his father's asses. When Samuel had gathered all the people together, using an ephod that revealed the will of God he pointed to Saul as the future first king of Israel. Samuel anointed Saul with holy oil, and the Spirit of God descended upon Saul and changed him.

After this the prophet said to the people, "If I have judged against anyone unjustly, bear witness against me before God's anointed one, and I will reimburse you."

But the people exclaimed, "You have always judged rightly!"

"Then I will bring my own case against you," said Samuel. "You rejected God, Who freed you from slavery. Now is the harvest, and there are no rains, but by my prayer it will begin to rain. That you may know the evil you have done in rejecting God's authority."

Samuel offered a sacrifice to the Creator, and immediately all those assembled were caught in a downpour. The Hebrews were terrified, but the prophet said, "You have done evil, but keep all the Commandments of God and do not depart from Him, and then He will not forsake you. If you again begin to serve idols, you and your king together will perish."

Saul defeated the Philistines in battle, but did not obey Samuel's order to wait for him in Galgala, and though not a priest he dared to offer sacrifice himself. The moment he completed the sacrificial offering the prophet came and said to him, "At this time God would have confirmed your reign, but now He will find for Himself a man after His own heart. He will not repent, for He is not a man, that He should change His mind."

After this Saul again violated God's will, failing to mete out judgment to the ancient enemies of Israel, the Amalakites, out of love of money. Then God completely rejected Saul, and commanded Samuel to anoint a new, righteous king.

## DAVID CONQUERS GOLIATH (1 Sam. 16–18)

After Saul violated the will of God the Lord secretly sent Samuel to anoint a new king in Bethlehem. Samuel went to Jesse and called his sons. The father brought each of his children to the prophet in turn, but the Lord found all of them unworthy.

"Man looks upon the face, but the Lord looks upon the heart," God said.

Then Samuel asked Jesse whether all his children were there. He replied that there was also the youngest, David, who was tending sheep.

He was brought, and God said, "Anoint him. It is he."



And Samuel poured a horn of holy oil upon David's head and anointed him king over Israel among his brethren. The Spirit of God rested upon David from that day on, but Saul was rejected by the Creator. An evil spirit began to torment him, and Saul sought a person to help him, and found David, who played the psaltery (a type of dulcimer). And when he played psalms the evil spirit would depart from Saul (to this day evil spirits fear the prayers from the psalms of David).

At that time Philistine forces invaded Israel, and Saul and his army went out to meet them. The Philistines had among their ranks the giant Goliath, who was nearly three meters tall. Goliath challenged the Hebrews to single combat, and blasphemed against God Almighty, but all were afraid, and no one wished to do battle with him.

The three elder sons of Jesse had entered this war, and their father sent David to visit his brothers and take some food to them. Upon coming to the camp David heard Goliath's blasphemy against the Lord, and offered to fight him. Despite his elder brothers' indignation he went to Saul and began asking to be allowed to fight, but Saul was afraid David was too young and would lose the battle.

But David said, “I have tended my father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear would attack them I would take them from its jaws, and would kill the beast. The same will happen to this uncircumcised man who reviles the army of the living God.”

Then Saul clothed him in his own armor, but it was too cumbersome for David. He took off the armor and placed a sling and five smooth stones into his bag.

Upon seeing David, Goliath laughed and said, “Am I a dog that you attack me with stones? Come to me; I will feed you to the beasts!”

To this David replied, “You attack me with sword and spear, but I attack with the name of the Lord of Sabaoth, the God of the army of Israel. I will kill you now, and all will know that it is not by sword and spear that the Lord saves us, for this is the Lord’s war, and He will give you into our hands.”

Goliath ran to meet him, and David took his sling and let fly with a stone straight at the giant’s forehead. The giant fell headlong, and David killed him with his own sword. Seeing the death of their finest warrior, the Philistines fled. Saul promoted David, making him his commander in chief and marrying him to his daughter.

David’s victory over Goliath shows Christians that one must not fear the terrible might of evil (whether visible or invisible). One must trust in God’s help, and then that terrible giant, the devil, will be killed with the stone of the name of Christ.

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## DAVID HIDES FROM SAUL (1 Sam. 18–27)

When David returned with Saul from the victory, the women sang, “Saul has conquered thousands, but David has conquered tens of thousands!”

Saul envied David, and decided that David wanted to depose him and take away his kingdom. Once when David was playing the psaltery in Saul’s presence the king threw a spear at him, intending to pin him to the wall, but the Lord turned aside the king’s blow. Saul began to fear David, for he saw that the Lord was with David and had left him. He attempted to kill David by putting him in the most hazardous battle positions, but God preserved him. A strong friendship was formed between Saul’s son Jonathan and David, and they swore fidelity to one another. Saul sent assassins to David, attempting to seize him when he was with Samuel, but here too God preserved David. Jonathan attempted to stop his father, but could not.

Finally, learning through Jonathan that Saul was intent on killing him, David resolved to flee. He went to the high priest, who gave him the sacred bread to eat, though the Law forbade this, and also gave him Goliath’s sword.



David fled to the country of the Philistines, where he heard that the Philistines considered him their worst enemy. To keep them from harming him David pretended to be insane. After this he returned to Judea, and all the oppressed and the debtors who had been downtrodden by the thievery of the moneylenders gathered to him, and David became their leader.

In the meantime in a fury Saul killed the high priest and all his relatives, and only one of his sons, Abiathar, escaped and began to serve David, learning the will of God. The prophet Gad likewise aided him. David fell upon a division of Philistines and conquered them, but even those whom David saved betrayed him, and he was forced to flee into the wilderness. Saul began searching for him with soldiers to kill him.

Once, while pursuing David through the wilderness, Saul entered a cave near Engaddi. Deep inside this cave David's own soldiers were hiding. The men proposed that he kill his foe, but he said, "May the Lord keep me from killing God's anointed one."

David cut off the hem of Saul's outer garment, and when he went out he showed him the piece of fabric and said, "Today the Lord gave you into my hands, but I did not harm you. I have not sinned against you, yet you wish to kill me without reason. May the Lord judge between us and save me."

Saul was moved, and said to him, "You are right, for you have repaid me good for evil. Who, upon finding his enemy, would let him go his way? The Lord will repay you with good for what you have done for me today."

Saul ceased persecuting David, but this was short-lived, and soon he again went in search of David to kill him. At night David and his friend Abi-



shai penetrated Saul's camp and entered the king's tent while he was sleeping. Abishai asked David to allow him to kill Saul with a single blow, but David forbade him, saying, "Let the Lord strike him or let him perish in battle, but I will not kill him."

He took the king's spear and his pitcher of water and left, and everyone slept, for God had brought sleep upon them. Then David went to the peak of a neighboring mountain, called out to the people, and began to reproach Saul for persecuting him without cause. Saul was again ashamed, and returned to the capital, and David fled to the Philistines, where Saul no longer sought him.

In the story of David's flight the Church sees a description of the life of a Christian. Like David we are anointed to kingship, but we are not yet crowned. The impure prince, Satan, persecutes us, attempting to kill us, but by doing battle with him we lose our right to evil. Only fidelity to the Creator, nobility, and courage will lead us to our enthronement.

## THE DEATH OF SAUL (1 Sam. 28–31)

First chosen, then rejected by the Creator, Saul finally met his end. He had failed to destroy David, God's anointed, and was left utterly alone. The terrible hordes of the Philistines came, and the Lord did not answer the king either in Revelation or through the prophets. In despair Saul resorted to magicians. Near the site of the coming battle, in Endor, there lived a witch, and to her the king went. He demanded that she call up the soul of the deceased prophet Samuel from hades, in order to learn the future from him. She at first refused to do so, then summoned a demon, but God sent the soul of the prophet himself to the apostate.

"Why do you trouble me?" Samuel asked.

"My soul is very heavy. The Philistines war against me, and God has left me and does not answer me. Teach me what to do."

"Why do you ask me, when the Lord has left you and made you his enemy? He will do as He has promised. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me, and the Israelites will be routed."

Upon hearing this Saul fainted. When he regained consciousness he had no strength whatsoever, because he had not eaten all day, and for a long time after he refused to eat.

In the morning the first king of Israel went to battle with the Philistines and was routed. His sons perished, and he committed suicide. Thus God punished him for his disobedience, his envy of David, and his consultation of magicians.



## DAVID BECOMES KING (2 Sam. 1–10; . 12–29)

When David learned of the demise of Saul and of his friend Jonathan, he mourned them in a hymn:

“Your beauty, O Israel, has been struck down upon your heights! Saul and Jonathan, who were amiable and concordant in their life, were not parted in death; swifter than eagles and stronger than lions were they! Jonathan has been smitten upon your heights, as the strong men fell in battle! I sorrow for you, my brother Jonathan; you were very dear to me.”

After Saul’s death, southern Israel chose David for their king. The high priest anointed him to kingship in Hebron. In the north Saul’s son Ishbosheth became king, but after a civil war his own courtiers treacherously killed him, hoping to curry favor with David. But David executed the murderers for their lawlessness, and all Israel acknowledged David as their king.

Upon becoming king David took Jerusalem by storm and made it the capital of Israel. Then he begins to conduct numerous successful wars, routing the Philistines and conquering the Ammonites, the Syrians, and the Idumeans.

David decided to transfer the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Together with the people he took it from Kiriath Jearim and placed it upon a chariot drawn by oxen. Suddenly the Ark lurched, and a man named Uzzah touched it to steady it, and immediately died: he was not a priest, and had no right to touch the shrine. Thus God shows that those who touch holy things without first being purified place themselves in mortal danger. The alarmed king left the Ark in the home of Obedom, and the Lord filled the house with blessings. Upon learning of this the king again gathered the people and again carried the Ark to Jerusalem, and as they carried it the priests offered sacrifices every six steps. The Levites blew their horns and trumpets and played on zithers and tambourines, and David, dressed in his royal robes, danced before the Ark with all his might. After the Ark was set in its place before the tabernacle, David blessed the people and established alternating choirs of chanters to sing psalms before the Face of God, and held a feast for all the people.

When David returned home, his wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, disparaged him: “How distinguished the king of Israel looked today, stripping naked in front of the servant girls, as might a frivolous person!”

To this David replied, *It was before the Lord [that I danced, and blessed be the Lord], Which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour* (2 Sam. 6:21–22).

God punished the haughty Michal with barrenness.

David built a palace for himself, but decided that it was unfitting for him to live in a palace while the Ark stood in a tent. He invited the prophet Nathan and said that he wished to build a temple for God. The prophet approved his desire, but God commanded that he say to the king, *Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in? ... I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel: And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth ... And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son* (2 Sam. 7:5, 8:12–14). By these words God foretold not only the reign of Solomon, David's son, who built the temple in Jerusalem, but also the birth of the greatest King of all, of the seed of David—Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of David, who sits upon the throne of David for all ages.

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Upon hearing this great prophecy David went to the Ark and said, *Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto thee? for Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant. For Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all these great things, to make Thy servant know them. Wherefore Thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there any God beside Thee ... And now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever* (2 Sam. 7:18–22, 25).

## DAVID'S SIN AND HIS REPENTANCE (2 Sam. 11–12)

**B**ut even so great a righteous man fell into a great sin. Once David was walking on the rooftop and saw a woman bathing. The king was so taken with her that he ordered her to be brought to him. Her name was Bathsheba, and she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite. David sinned with her, and she became pregnant. At the time her husband was away at war with the Ammonites, and David sent the commander a letter telling him to place Uriah where the worst of the fighting would occur. This the commander did, and Uriah perished in battle. After this the king took Bathsheba as his wife. The Lord was angry with David, and sent the prophet Nathan to the king.

The prophet went to David and said, "There were two men, a rich man and a poor one. The rich man had enormous flocks, while the poor man had

only a single sheep, who was like a daughter to him. A traveler came to the rich man, and he had to prepare a meal for him, but the rich man did not wish to give up one of his own sheep. He took away the poor man's only sheep and slaughtered it for the man who had come. What does he deserve?"

David became angry and cried, "He deserves to die! He must pay four-fold for this deed."

Nathan replied, *Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel ... And I gave thee thy master's house ... and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife ... Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife ... I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour* (2 Sam. 12:7–11).

David repented, and God had mercy on him, promising him that he would not die; nevertheless, as punishment for his sin the child born of adultery died, though David prayed and fasted in his behalf. After this Bathsheba bore him a son, Solomon, and other sons. A model of King David's repentance is found in his 50th psalm.

## THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM (2 Sam. 13–19)

David did not escape punishment for his iniquity: his son Absalom instigated a rebellion against him. He had angered his father by killing his brother Amnon, but David had forgiven Absalom and permitted him to live in Jerusalem.

Absalom was a handsome man, with luxurious hair, and very proud of himself. After his father forgave him he acquired chariots and runners and began to suggest to the Israelites that he would be a better king than David, and made himself very amiable to the people. Once Absalom gathered his supporters in Hebron and declared war on his father. Many of David's friends and advisors betrayed him, and he resolved to flee from his son. He left Jerusalem, and on the Mount of Olivet he wept because he was leaving the tabernacle of God. It was in that same place that, many years later, a great descendant of David also wept as He went to His death.

In the meantime Absalom seized the holy city, but God destroyed his intentions, taking away his reason: he did not heed the wise counsel of Ahithophel to pursue David immediately, and thus sealed his fate. The traitor Ahithophel, seeing his advice ignored, went and hanged himself, as later did Judas.

In the meantime war broke out, and the forces of Absalom were routed. The rebel fled from the field of battle into the forest, but was caught by his hair in the branches. His mule ran off, and he was left hanging twixt heaven and earth by his luxurious hair, until the commander Joab shot him. David wept for his son and enemy for a long time, and magnanimously forgave his foes. Those who remained faithful to him he rewarded richly.

Thus the Lord shows us what punishment awaits one who despises his parents.

## SOLOMON BUILDS THE TEMPLE (1 Kings 1–9; 2 Chron. 2–7)

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When David was close to death, in fulfillment of the Lord's will and of his promise given to Bathsheba he commanded that Solomon be anointed to kingship. David dies, having first instructed Solomon to keep the Law of God exactly and to build a temple for the Lord. Soon after taking the throne Solomon went to Gibeon, where the main altar was located, and asked God for wisdom, that he might rule the people righteously. That night the Lord appeared to him and gave him the gift he had asked: *Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee ... And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days* (1 Kings 3:11–12, 14).

To fulfill his father's wish and the intention of his own heart, Solomon decided to build a temple unto the name of the Lord, for which he hires master builders in Phoenicia from King Hiram. Construction began in early May in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, and was completed in October of the eleventh year.

The temple stood on the site where Abraham had offered his son Isaac in sacrifice. The chief part of the temple was made of expensive white rock and planked with valuable cedar boards. Inside the sanctuary there was a wall separating the holy of holies by double-wing doors and a curtain. Above the holy of holies stretched the wings of two statues of cherubim, overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant. The holy sanctuary was adorned with gold encrustations depicting palms, fruits, blossoming flowers, and, among them, cherubim. Thus, the interior of the temple was a likeness of paradise.

Outside also cherubim adorned the walls, as a reminder of the spirits that bar the path to the tree of life. In the temple ten lamps burned, a reminder



of the Ten Commandments. At the entrance to the sanctuary stood two brass pillars, as an image of the two commandments—of love for God and love for neighbor—to which all the Law may be reduced. Before the curtain stood an altar of incense—an image of the prayers of the saints.

In the courtyard of the temple stood an altar where sacrifices were offered, an ambon for preaching and for prayers, and ten brass washbasins adorned with depictions of lions, bulls, and cherubim. In the temple courtyard there also stood an enormous water vessel resembling a blooming lily.

In this way the temple presented a likeness of the universe as God had intended it to be, but there were no depictions of people in the temple, for our generation had fallen away from the Lord.

When construction was completed Solomon assembled all the people, and the priests triumphantly carried the Ark of the Covenant to the temple, offering numerous sacrifices, and countless choirs, accompanied by the sounds of trumpets and other musical instruments, glorified God, for His mercy endures forever.

When the Ark was brought into the holy of holies the cloud of the glory of God filled the temple, so that the priests could not enter it to serve. And fire from heaven struck the sacrifices and consumed them.

Then Solomon spoke to the people and said, “The Lord said He wills to dwell in darkness, but I have built You a house to dwell in, O Holy One—a place for Your eternal abode. God has not left a single one of His good promises unfulfilled.”

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord, lifted up his hands to heaven, and said, *But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded? Yet have Thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to hearken unto the cry and to the prayer, which Thy servant prayeth before Thee to day: That Thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which Thou hast said, My name shall be there: that Thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which Thy servant shall make toward this place* (1 Kings 8:27–29).

Then Solomon asked that the Lord judge the cause of those who would ask His judgment in the temple; that He forgive the sins of the Israelites, who had been routed by their enemies; that through prayer in the temple rain should come upon the earth, famines cease, and plague, locusts, the worm, foes, and sickness should pass away. It was not only the Hebrews who were to pray in the temple, however, but every foreigner who sought the face of God. The king likewise asked that through prayer in the temple God give victory to His people in war, and that He would hear the Hebrews, if they were taken prisoner, when they worshiped in the direction of the temple.

After praying Solomon blessed the people and offered rich sacrifices, and all the people made merry before the face of God. That night God appeared to Solomon and said that He had heard his prayer and hallowed the temple. And the throne of Solomon He would make firm, if the king would be faithful to the Creator. If he and his children apostatized from God, however, He would destroy Israel from the earth and make that nation a proverb and a laughingstock among the nations, and the temple would be burned in punishment for the violation of the covenant.



After construction of the temple Solomon built himself a luxurious palace of cedar. He was extremely rich, and many kings paid tribute to him, and his ships sailed into far-off countries.

Solomon's fame spread throughout all the earth. Hearing of his wisdom, the queen of Sheba came to the king to test him, and saw that Solomon was even more greatly endowed with both intellect and riches than she had heard. Thus God glorified the son of David, and a part of his wisdom is preserved in the books that he wrote—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

## SOLOMON'S FALL INTO SIN (1 Kings 11)

Solomon did not remain at the peak of his glory, however. He took to wife the daughters of foreigners, and they corrupted him. To indulge them Solomon had a temple to their idols built near Jerusalem, and God became angry with him. For this iniquity the Lord promised to divide the kingdom of Israel, but that this would happen only after Solomon's death, for the sake of David, his father. Here we see how careful one must be in choosing a wife, for if this wisest of kings was cast down into the abyss of idolatry through the impiety of his wife, how much more terrible a fate threatens a Christian who marries a non-believer!

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Even during Solomon's lifetime God raised up opponents against him—Ader, who became the leader of the Idumeans, and Razon, who became king of Syria, part of Solomon's domain. But his chief adversary was Jeroboam, to whom the prophet Ahijah foretold that he would become king over ten tribes of Israel. As a sign of this the prophet tore his cloak into twelve pieces and gave ten of them to Jeroboam. God said that if he would be faithful to Him he and his dynasty, like David's, would be strong.

Solomon lived to a ripe old age and died. According to tradition he entered the temple and stood, leaning on his staff, and standing thus he reposed. No one dared approach the wise king, but a worm ate through the staff, and the king fell in the temple that had been his greatest glory.

## THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

(1 Kings 12, 2 Chron. 10:1–19)

After the death of Solomon his son Rehoboam came to Shechem, where the people had gathered to place him on the throne. Jeroboam and the other Hebrews began asking him to ease the tax burden Solomon had placed on



them. Rehoboam took counsel with the elders, and they proposed that he agree to a compromise on the people's demands, so that the people would always support him in the future. The young king was not pleased by their counsel, however, and then he asked the advice of his peers, who advised him to make the people's lives even more difficult. This advice pleased the proud, foolish king.

"My father placed a heavy yoke upon you," he said to the people, "but I will make your yoke still greater; my father punished you with whips, but I will punish you with scorpions" [whips with barbs—*Auth.*].

Rehoboam's pride was his undoing, as it has always been for every proud man. The people dispersed to their homes; they refused to recognize Rehoboam as king, and they stoned his tribute collector. The ten tribes, with the tribe of Ephraim at their head, proclaimed Jeroboam king. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained faithful to the dynasty of King David. Thus God's prophecy which had been revealed to the prophet Ahijah was fulfilled, and Solomon's apostasy was punished.

Rehoboam assembled troops to declare war on Jeroboam, but the prophet Shemaiah forbade the people to fight, for the kingdom's destruction was of God.

From that time on Israel remained in schism up until the Babylonian captivity, and this division exists in Israel to this day.

## THE CRIME OF JEROBOAM

(1 Kings 12:26–33; 13, 14)

After the division of the kingdoms Jeroboam committed a grave crime against God. He decided that having a single place for worshiping the Lord in Jerusalem would undermine his power, and he introduced a new cult. Two golden calves were constructed and set up in Bethel and Dan. And the king said, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who led you out of Egypt." Thus the crime of the Hebrews at the foot of Mount Sinai was repeated. Jeroboam drove out the Levites, established new feasts, and appointed new unlawful priests, repaying God for all His blessings with the blackest ingratitude. And God's chastisement was not long in coming.

On the 15th of Bul (October–November), on the first newly-established feast of the calves, Jeroboam was burning incense before the idol. At that moment a prophet sent by the Lord from Judea approached and said, addressing the altar, "O altar, altar! Thus says the Lord: a son will be born to the house of David; his name is Josiah, and he will kill your priests and will defile you.

And this is the sign that this will occur: this altar here shall fall to pieces, and the ashes upon it shall be scattered.”

And immediately the altar collapsed and its ashes were scattered. In a fury Jeroboam pointed at the prophet and ordered that he be arrested. But his outstretched arm became petrified so that he could not move it at all. The frightened king asked for mercy, and at the prayer of the prophet his arm was healed. Jeroboam invited him in, wishing to mollify him, but the prophet replied that God had forbidden him to eat and drink anything in that place.

But when he left he was followed by a certain seer who invited the prophet into his house to eat with him, lying to him that an angel had commanded him to return. The prophet went, and after the meal the Holy Spirit said to him through the seer that he would not reach his home in punishment for disobeying the Lord. For if God Himself commands a thing one must obey no other, neither angel nor man. Along the way the prophet was killed by a lion, who did not touch the ass upon which the prophet rode, thereby showing that he was merely doing the will of the Creator. The seer buried the body of the prophet, giving orders that he be buried beside him, for he knew that the word of God always comes to pass. And so it occurred: when nearly three hundred years later King Josiah destroyed the calves and the altar, he spared the bones of the prophet.

Despite the warning, however, Jeroboam did not swerve from his evil path, and God punished him. The king's first-born son became ill, and he decided to learn the outcome of the illness. To do this Jeroboam sent his wife to the prophet Ahijah, who had foretold his kingship, and told her to change her clothes. When she entered his house, however, Ahijah, though blind, recognized her and said:

“For what did you change your clothes? I am a dread messenger for you. Tell Jeroboam this. Thus says the Lord God of Israel: I exalted you from among the people and set you as the leader of My people Israel, but you have done worse than all who were before you, and have made yourself idols so as to vex Me, and have put Me aside. For this I will bring misfortunes upon all who are with Jeroboam, and will sweep out the house of Jeroboam, as refuse is swept out, until it is clean. All his relations shall perish and shall be deprived of burial. And this shall be a sign. Your son shall die the moment you cross the threshold. And this will occur because he is the only one who has been found pleasing to Me. And the Lord will strike Israel, and it will be like a reed waving in the water. And He will drive him out of this good land that He gave him for his iniquity.”

All this occurred as it was said. The moment Jeroboam's wife crossed the threshold her son died, and God sent a terrible illness upon Jeroboam himself, and he died in torment. Thus the Lord punishes the ungrateful!

## THE END OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

(1 Kings, 2 Kings)

After the apostasy of Jeroboam the kingdom of Israel began sinking to new moral lows. All the kings of the ten tribes were unfaithful to God and worshipped the golden calves. Many of them lapsed into direct worship of the false gods Baal and Astarte. They offered them sacrifices, even human sacrifices, and built temples in their honor, planting oak forests in which ritual debauchery was practiced.

God used every means to bring the Hebrew people to their senses. He sent them prophets who proclaimed God's righteous judgments, foretold the future, and condemned the impiety of the kings, several of whom did in fact obey the will of the Creator. But to the very last day of the kingdom of Israel not one of them rejected the worship of the calves! This was cited as a "state necessity," as the kings feared that the Hebrew people would again be united under the authority of the descendants of the holy King David. This policy resulted in countless enemy invasions, sent by God upon the disobedient, as well as a series of plots and uprisings that shook Israel throughout its history. This is what always occurs when religion is used to accomplish the goals of the state, instead of obliging the state to serve God.

Jeroboam's son Nabat, as Ahijah had prophesied, was killed, the dynasty of his murderer Baasa was likewise obliterated, and so it went until the kingdom itself was destroyed. But it was under King Ahab that Israel reached the ultimate spiritual low, when the former married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Tyre. In the new capital of Samaria (established by his father Omri) Ahab built a temple to Baal and planted an oak grove to Astarte near the palace. It was during his reign that the curse of Joshua son of Nun was first risked and Jericho was rebuilt. And as Joshua had foretold, the rebuilder of the city buried his firstborn son in the city's foundation, and his youngest son under its gates.

## THE PROPHET ELIJAH (1 Kings 17–18)

At this time, when the kingdom of Israel was submerged in the depths of idolatry, God sent his people a fiery teacher of repentance: the prophet Elijah. According to tradition, while he was still an infant his father saw an angel feed Elijah with fire.

Under King Ahab, who worshiped Baal and Astartes as he had been taught by his wife Jezebel, Elijah went out to preach and proclaimed: *As the*

*Lord God of Israel liveth, before Whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word* (1 Kings 17:1). And so it happened. A terrible drought ensued, the rivers dried up, all the grass burned up, and a famine began. The idolaters, who had thought the rain was given to them by the idols and the demons, saw that the Creator lived.

At the time Elijah lived in the wilderness by a stream, and morning and evening a raven brought him bread and meat. Thus God taught him mercy using the example of a bird of prey. When the water dried up, at God's word Elijah left Israel and went to Sarepta in Sidon. At the gates of the city he met a widow who had only a handful of flour and a little oil left. The prophet asked her for bread, and promised that the flour and oil in her home would not run out until the drought ended. The widow believed him, and a miracle indeed occurred: throughout those years, according to the word of the Lord spoken through His prophet, the oil in her home did not fail and the flour did not run out.

Some time later the widow's son became sick and died. Elijah took him to his room and cried out to the Lord, saying, "O Lord my God, will you really do evil even to the widow with whom I abide by slaying her son?"

And stretching himself out upon the youth thrice, thereby prefiguring the mystery of the Holy Trinity, he cried out to the Lord and said, *O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again* (1 Kings 17:21). And the Lord heard Elijah's voice, and the soul of the youth returned to him, and he came back to life. Thus Elijah showed that God would conquer death, and for this reason this passage is read in church on the eve of Pascha.

Three and a half years passed, and at God's word Elijah went to meet Ahab, that the Lord might send rain upon the land which was tormented with drought. He commanded the king to gather all the people and all the false prophets of Baal and Astarte at Mount Carmel. These numbered 850.

When the people were assembled, Elijah said to them, *How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him* (1 Kings 18:21).

And the people did not answer him a word.

And Elijah said to the people, "I alone remain, the prophet of the Lord, but the prophets of Baal number four hundred and fifty, and of Astarte—four hundred. Let us be given two bulls, and let them choose one bull for themselves and butcher it, and place it upon wood, but let them light no fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it upon wood, and will light no fire. And you will call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of Yaweh (He Who Is), my God. The God that gives an answer through fire is God."

And the people said, "It is well!"

The priests of Baal offered a sacrifice and began to cry out, from morning until noon, "Baal, Baal, hear us!" But there was neither voice nor movement.

At noon Elijah began to mock them and to say, “Cry out with a loud voice, for he is god! Perhaps he is lost in thought, or is busy with something, or is away; or perhaps he is sleeping, and this will wake him!”

They continued to yell and cut themselves with knives, but it was useless: Baal did not answer.

In the evening Elijah said for them to stand back. He restored an ancient ruined altar built of twelve stones, according to the number of Jacob’s sons. Around it the prophet dug a ditch. He slaughtered a bull, placed it on the wood, and ordered that four buckets of water be poured on the sacrifice three times, so that the ditch was filled with water. (By this triple pouring he also showed the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and the twelve buckets were a symbol of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles, who carried the fire of the Spirit throughout the earth).

Then Elijah cried out to heaven, “O You Who Are, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel! Hear me, O Lord, hear me! Let these people know this day that You alone are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and have done all according to Your word! Hear me, O Lord, hear me! Let this people know that You are God, O Lord, and You will turn their hearts toward You!”

And the fire of the Lord descended and consumed the whole-burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and swallowed up the water that was in the ditch. And all the people fell down and cried, “The Lord is God, the Lord is God!”

And Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal, that not one of them may hide!”

And they seized them, and Elijah led them to the river Kisson and slew them there in punishment for the sins of idolatry and murder that they had committed.

Then Elijah told Ahab to enter his chariot, as it would now begin to rain. The prophet himself knelt and began to pray to God, and from the sea rose a little raincloud, and then a revitalizing rain came down in a torrent. Ahab was moved to tears, but his wife’s heart was hardened, and she vowed to kill Elijah.

## THE APPEARANCE OF GOD ON HOREB (1 Kings 19)

**E**lijah was afraid of Ahab’s wife and fled to the south of Palestine, to Beer-sheba. There he fell into despondency and asked God for death. When he fell asleep an angel woke him, gave him bread and water, and said, “Arise, eat and drink, for you have a long road ahead of you.”

Elijah ate, and went forty days and forty nights on the strength of that food to the holy mountain of Horeb, where Moses made the Covenant with God. This was a special fast, which prepared the prophet for his meeting with the Lord, and the angelic bread was a symbol of Holy Communion, which strengthens us in our life's paths.

Upon reaching the mountain, among the terrible desert cliffs Elijah found a cave and passed the night there. In the morning, submitting to the word of the Lord, Elijah left the cave, and suddenly a series of dread phenomena occurred before him, indicating the approach of the Creator. And the Lord said to Elijah, *Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice [and the Lord was there]* (1 Kings 19:11–12). Hearing God's voice Elijah covered his face with his mantle and stood in the entrance to the cave, for the time had not yet come when man could see God and live: God had not yet become a man. A century later on another mountain Elijah beheld God, but this time he did not cover his face, for God had become a man.

And the Lord asked the prophet, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

"I have been zealous for the Lord God of Sabaoth," replied Elijah, "for the sons of Israel have left Your covenant, have destroyed Your altars, and have killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, but they seek my soul also, to take it away."

"Go back," God commanded him, "and anoint Elisha as your successor. Appoint Hazael king of Syria, and anoint Jehu king of Israel. They will take vengeance on the people for their apostasy. Nonetheless, I Myself have left seven thousand men in Israel who have not worshiped Baal, and their lips have not kissed him."

Thus Elijah came to know God both as merciful and as just. He learned also that he was not the only one left in Israel who was faithful to the Creator, but that God was preserving a remnant of the faithful, concealed from the eyes of others.

As he was returning Elijah saw Elisha, who was plowing a field together with his servants. Elijah threw his mantle upon him, calling him to the prophetic ministry.

"Let me go first and bid my parents farewell," Elisha requested.

"Go and return, for what have I done to you?" Elijah answered.

Then, as a sign of his break with his former life, Elisha slaughtered a pair of bulls, roasted them on a fire made from his plow, and gave the meat to the people, while he himself went and followed Elijah. So must every man

act whom the Creator calls. One cannot wait for a convenient time, but must obey God immediately when He calls.

This account is read in churches on the feast of the Transfiguration, when Elijah saw God face to face, and on the day of the prophet's commemoration—August 2.

## NABOTH'S VINEYARD AND THE DEATH OF AHAB (1 Kings 21–22)

**K**ing Ahab did not learn from Elijah's miracle; instead he compounded his sins against God with sins against the people. This is what always happens when a person forgets the Lord.

Near the king's palace in Samaria there was a vineyard that belonged to Naboth, and the king decided to acquire it. The owner refused to sell it, for according to God's Law the earth could not be sold and transferred to another generation.

Ahab was upset, as he was extremely mercenary, but his wife Jezebel devised a crafty plan. She convinced the elders to falsify an accusation against Naboth and condemn him to death. And so it happened. Naboth was slandered and killed on his own land. Upon learning of this the king went to take the vineyard into his own possession. But there he was met by a dread messenger of God: Elijah.

Disturbed, the king exclaimed, "So you have found me, my enemy!"

Elijah answered, "I have, for you have begun to do what is displeasing in the Lord's sight and to vex Him. Thus says the Lord: behold, I will bring misfortunes upon you and sweep out after you, and will destroy all your kin, so that none of them will be buried, for the offense by which you have vexed me. Likewise concerning Jezebel God has said: The dogs will devour Jezebel outside the walls of the city. Never has there been one who has so vexed God as has Ahab, as he has been taught this by his wife Jezebel. And on that place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick your blood also."

Upon hearing this dread prophecy Ahab repented, wept, and rent his clothing. Upon seeing this God said to Elijah that because of this repentance He would bring about these punishments not during Ahab's life, but during his son's. As his repentance was temporary, the punishment was not annulled, but merely delayed.

Soon after this Ahab went to war with the Syrians, on the advice of false prophets who foretold that he would be victorious. The true prophet Micah, who foretold Ahab's defeat, was imprisoned by the king. During this battle,



despite his attempt to take shelter, Ahab was mortally wounded and died, standing in his chariot. His body was brought to the capital, and the blood was washed from the chariot in the field of Naboth, and the dogs licked it. Thus the prediction of the prophet Elijah was fulfilled, showing that through his iniquities a person is capable of becoming like rubbish in God's eyes, to be swept out and eliminated. As Blessed Theodoret noted, God is longsuffering of sins against Himself (though these too He does not leave unpunished), but He is swift to punish crimes against defenseless people.<sup>96</sup> So it was with Ahab: for a long time God tried to correct the ungodly king, but when he put an innocent man to death his dynasty came to an end.

### ELIJAH AND KING AHAZIAH (2 Kings 1)

After the death of Ahab, his son Ahaziah ascended the throne of the northern kingdom. He fell from an upper story and was injured, and decided to ask a seer regarding the outcome of his illness. This seer abode in the temple of Baalzebub, the lord of the flies and the prince of the demons. Elijah went out to meet those sent by the king and ordered them to return to the king and said to him, *Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die* (2 Kings 1:6). King Ahaziah heard these words and, understanding from the description that it was Elijah (who had been dressed in a garment of mourning—a hair shirt girded with a leather belt), sent soldiers to arrest him.

Elijah was sitting on a mountain, and the commander of the detachment said to him, “Man of God! The king says for you to come down!”

The prophet replied, “If I am a man of God, may fire descend from heaven and consume you and your detachment.”

And immediately fire from heaven consumed the ungodly men who had attempted to arrest the prophet. The same occurred with the second detachment that attempted to arrest Elijah. The commander of the third detachment fell on his knees before the prophet and begged him to spare him and his detachment. Then an angel commanded Elijah to go with them to the king. Upon reaching Ahaziah Elijah repeated to his face God's sentence, and the king immediately died, as Elijah had said. This is a reminder to all those who desert the one God and turn to sorcerers and seers, wanting to know the future: the same sentence from God awaits them.

<sup>96</sup> Blessed Theodoret of Cyrus, *Church History*, Vol. I

## THE ASCENSION OF ELIJAH

(2 Kings 2:1–18)

The time came for Elijah to depart from this world. Scripture describes the mysterious circumstances of his disappearance. Elijah was walking his final path with Elisha, and along the way marvelous signs and wonders accompanied him. They were met by prophets, who said to Elisha, “Do you know that today the Lord will raise up your lord above your head?”

He replied, “I also know; be silent.”

When Elijah proposed that he stay behind, Elisha replied, “As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!”

They went up to the Jordan. Elijah struck the river with his mantle and the waters parted, so that they crossed the Jordan on dry land. Then Elijah asked what Elisha would like to receive from him before his departure. Elisha asked for himself the gift of the Holy Spirit that rested upon Elijah, but two times over. Elijah answered that if Elisha saw his ascension his request would be fulfilled, but if not, it would not.

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As they were walking, suddenly a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and parted them, and Elijah was carried up in a whirlwind into heaven. According to Tradition he entered the Paradise Adam had lost, and abides there in the flesh, awaiting the coming of the last days. As Ephraim the Syrian writes, “Enoch and Elijah prefigured this mystery, for they were caught up and taken to paradise. Two conquerors went into that place from which two were forced to go out in shame. Two conquerors entered paradise that two might denounce the two others conquered in paradise ... He who was proud was driven out of paradise, while he who abased himself entered paradise.” Later the prophet will again return to the earth, and together with the righteous one of old, Enoch, he will denounce the Antichrist and convert the Hebrew people to the Lord Jesus, and then will receive death at the hands of the enemy of the human race.<sup>97</sup> His ascension prefigured man’s return to paradise and Christ’s ascension into heaven.

Upon seeing Elijah’s fiery ascension, Elisha cried, *My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof* (2 Kings 2:12). These words of Elisha showed that Elijah alone could take the place of all the armies of Israel. He saw Elijah no more, and in terrible grief he tore his clothing. During this ascension Elijah’s mantle, permeated with the light of this divine manifestation, fell upon Elisha, and with it a double portion of grace descended upon him. This uncreated energy descended upon John the Baptist as well, which is why the Lord Jesus called him Elijah (Mt. 11:14).

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<sup>97</sup> Saint Ephraim the Syrian, *Collected Works*, 142: *Adam and Eve*

## MIRACLES OF THE PROPHET ELISHA

(2 Kings 2:19–7:20)

Elisha returned and went up to the Jordan. He was faced with a current, and there was no crossing. Elisha folded Elijah's mantle and struck the river with it, but the water did not part.

"Where is the God of Elijah, He Himself?" he exclaimed—and the waters parted.

Elisha crossed the river on dry land, showing the miracle to be performed not by the miraculous qualities of a sacred object, but by the power of God Almighty, acting through His creation. This miracle likewise prefigured baptism, by which we cross the path of this life and enter into the goodness of eternity.

When he came to Jericho the people complained to him that here *the water is naught, and the ground barren* (2 Kings 2:19). Elisha commanded that salt be brought in a cup, and he sprinkled it into the stream with the words, *Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land* (2 Kings 2:21). And it was so. To this day Elisha's spring bubbles forth in Jericho and is noted for its curative powers. This miracle prefigured the salvation accomplished by the death of the Savior: as salt prevents decay, so the incorrupt Body of Christ in the depths of death engendered eternal Life for all of mankind that is reborn in baptism.

When Elisha was going past Bethel, a worship center dedicated to the calves, the children of the idolaters began mocking him as the prophet of the Creator.

"Go on, bald head! Go on, bald head!" they yelled.

Then Elisha turned and cursed them in the name of the Lord, and immediately two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled many of the children for having despised the prophet (Deut. 18:19). For the Law itself forbids mocking a person's physical defects! (Lev. 19:14).

Once, when Israel and Judea were at war with the kingdom of Moab, the Hebrew forces found themselves with no water. At the request of the pious Judean king Jehoshaphat, Elisha prayed and ordered that ditches be dug, which then filled with water. The Moabitians thought it was the blood of the Hebrews glimmering, and surged forward. Then the forces of the Israelites fell upon them and routed them. Only King Mesha escaped, who offered his son in sacrifice to the demons. Frightened, the superstitious Israelites retreated. God gave the Hebrews both salvation and victory through the prayers of the prophet, but their impiety prevented them from taking advantage of these.

Another time Elisha saved the widow of a certain prophet from being sold into slavery to repay a debt. He commanded her to lock herself in her house, and to fill from her sole remaining pitcher of oil all the vessels she had

and was able to borrow from her neighbors. The oil in the pitcher did not fail until there were no more vessels. With the money from the sale of the oil the widow not only paid her debt, but was even able to keep her children fed. This miracle prefigured the Church, in which all who wish to enter into the Father's House are filled with the Holy Spirit from the One Christ. They are not only freed from their debt to God's righteousness, but also receive eternal life.

In the city of Shunem Elisha went to live with a certain rich woman who suffered from barrenness, and by his prayers she gave birth to a son. Tragically, it so happened that when the child grew up he got sunstroke and died. At the time Elisha was living on Mount Carmel, and the woman ran to him to tell him of her sorrow. The saint knew nothing of this, for prophets are not omniscient, but know only what God reveals to them. Upon hearing from the woman of her grief, however, he went to Shunem, took the child, and laying him upon his bed, prayed to the Lord, and stretched himself out over him, infusing him with the power of the Life-creating Spirit. The child sneezed seven times and returned to life, and Elisha delivered him to his mother. This miracle likewise prefigured the ultimate victory that Christ carried over death, and for this reason this passage is read in churches on the eve of Pascha.

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At the prayers of Elisha, in punishment for idolatry a seven-year famine came upon Israel (which lasted twice as long as the one that occurred in the time of Elijah, as a sign of the double portion of grace Elisha had received). During the famine Elisha ordered his servant to prepare pottage for the sons of the prophets. One of these went out into the field to gather vegetables and gathered a number of wild fruits which he tossed into the pot of pottage. The fruits proved poisonous, and when they began to eat they cried out, "There is death in the pot!"

Elisha sprinkled flour into the pot, and the pottage became harmless. This miracle prefigured the great power of the Sacrament of Communion, which immortalized our nature that had been infected with sin.

Another time the prophet fed a hundred people with twelve loaves and a handful of grain, and they ate their fill with food to spare. Thus the Lord showed that there is one God of the Old and the New Testaments. For the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ twice worked a similar miracle.

At that time in Damascus there lived a military commander of the Syrian king, named Naaman, who was ill with leprosy. Upon learning that there was a prophet in Israel who was able to heal him he went to Elisha, but instead of going out to meet him (for the law forbade going near a leper) the prophet ordered Naaman to immerse himself seven times in the waters of the Jordan, and then he would be healed. At first Naaman was indignant that the prophet had not come out to meet him himself, but then he resolved to obey Elisha after all. When he had immersed himself seven times in the waters of the sacred river, his flesh became like that of a newborn. This miracle symbolized the

renewal our soul is given in holy baptism. This is the more clear considering that Naaman was healed in the same place where the Lord was later baptized.

Naaman accepted the true faith and asked Elisha to accept gifts from him, but he refused.

When Naaman had left, Elisha's servant Gehazi, smitten with avarice, caught up with Naaman and begged gifts of him, which Naaman gave him. These he hid in his home, and returned to Elisha as though nothing had happened. But the prophet rebuked him, saying, "Did not my heart walk with you when you accepted the gifts? Therefore let Naaman's leprosy be upon you and your descendants forever."

Gehazi left Elisha white as snow with leprosy. Thus he received the reward for his avarice and his falsehood, and the commander Naaman became an exemplary converter of the pagan nations to the Creator.

Another time the disciples of Elisha were building themselves a home near the Jordan. An axe flew from the hands of its wielder and sank; the axe belonged to another. Then Elisha threw a piece of wood into the water, and the axe floated to the surface. The wood symbolized the Cross, and the steel axe symbolized our nature, which was drowning in the depths of death and which ascended to heaven through the Cross.

Elisha frequently saved Israel from the attacks of the Syrians by his clairvoyance, and the Syrian king ordered that he be killed. A detachment of Syrians surrounded the city where the prophet was. His servant was in despair, but through Elisha's prayer he saw a fiery chariot and a host of angels defending the saint, as David said: *The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them* (Ps. 33:8). In the same way God's angels defend every baptized person who strives to please God, and we know of numerous instances when our guardian angels have interceded for us before God.

At the prayer of the prophet God smote the Syrians with blindness, and Elisha led them to the center of Samaria. There they received their sight, and convinced of God's might they came to Israel no more. The king of Syria, however, decided to lay siege to Samaria, and a terrible famine began there, leading even to cannibalism. Upon learning of this the impious king at first decided to kill Elisha, but then changed his mind and sent to ask his advice. And Elisha foretold that by morning even the most expensive bread would cost but a shekel, literally pennies. The king's advisor did not believe the prophet, who then foretold that he would see this with his own eyes, but would not be able to taste it. And so it happened. That night it seemed to the Syrians that a vast army was attacking them, and they fled in a panic, deserting their camp. Upon learning of this the people rushed to pillage the Syrians, and indeed bread then cost but a shekel. The dignitary who had doubted Elisha's words and who was appointed to oversee the pillaging was trampled by the crowd. Thus all the predictions of the prophet were fulfilled.

## THE FULFILLMENT OF THE COMMAND ON HOREB (2 Kings 8–10)

**T**he time had come to fulfill the command given to the prophet Elijah to anoint those who would avenge the broken Covenant. The multitude of miracles worked by the prophets had in no way convinced the apostates, and the time of punishment had arrived.

Obedient to the command of the Lord, Elisha came to Damascus. The king of Syria was ill at the time, and sent his dignitary Hazael to the prophet to learn whether or not he would recover. Elisha foretold to Hazael that he would become king, and looking upon him wept, seeing how much evil he would bring upon the Hebrews in revenge for their apostasy. Hazael killed his lord, took the throne himself, and indeed became a scourge for Israel.

Then came the time to anoint a new king for Israel as well. Elisha sent one of the prophets to anoint Jehu, who was then the commander in chief. And the prophet came to the place where Jehu lived, when he was sitting with the other military commanders. The prophet led Jehu into a private room and poured a pitcher of oil upon his head with these words:

“Thus says the Lord: I anoint you king over Israel, that you may work vengeance upon the house of Ahab for the blood of My servants the prophets who were killed by Jezebel.”

Without waiting for an answer the prophet fled, as this was what Elisha had instructed him to do.

The warriors asked Jehu sarcastically, “Why did that madman come here?”

Upon learning that Jehu had been anointed as the new king, however, they cried, “Long live the king!” Here we see the effect of holy anointing, which is able to transfigure the hearts of even the most hardened skeptics.

Soon after Jehu attacked Ahab’s son, Joram, and killed him along with Ahaziah, king of Judea, who paid the debt for his impiety. Joram’s corpse was flung into the field of Naboth, and thus Elijah’s prophecy was fulfilled, and the innocent blood that was shed was avenged.

When Jehu arrived in Jezreel (Israel’s second capital), Jezebel put on her makeup and donned all her ornaments to show her fearlessness. Seeing the new king, she asked, “Does the slayer of his master have peace?”

But Jehu ordered her to be thrown out the window, and her blood splattered and was trampled by horses (sacred animals of Baal, whom she worshiped). When they went to bury her they found nothing left of her but her skull, feet, and hands. Thus the saying of Elijah was fulfilled: *In the portion*

*of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel* (2 Kings 9:36–37).

And Jehu destroyed all the relatives of Ahab, as the Lord had foretold. He decided to destroy all the worshipers of Baal, and to this end he held a great feast in honor of the idol. All his priests assembled in the pagan temple, and Jehu ordered that they all be executed. He destroyed the temple and made it a place of uncleanness. Thus the words of God spoken to Elijah on Horeb were fulfilled, that Jehu and Ahaziah of Syria and the prophet Elisha would carry out the execution of the idolaters.

But Jehu too was not willing to destroy the golden calves, and for this Israel was doomed.

## THE DEATH OF ELISHA

(2 Kings 13:14–21)

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Elisha fell mortally ill, and Joash, king of Israel, the son of Jehu, came to him. He wept over him and cried out, involuntarily repeating the words of Elisha himself at Elijah's ascension, *My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof* (2 Kings 13:14).

Before his death the prophet saw to the prosperity of his people and ordered the king to shoot an arrow toward Syria, and himself laid his hands upon the hands of the king, infusing them with prophetic power. When he let the arrow fly, Elisha said that this was an arrow of deliverance from Syria. Then at the prophet's command the king struck the earth thrice with arrows, and Elisha foretold that he would crush the Syrians thrice. And the great prophet of God died, and was buried.

A year after his death a funeral procession was passing by his sepulchre. Suddenly it was attacked by Moabite warriors, and the people threw the corpse into the tomb of Elisha and fled. Upon touching the bones of the prophet, the dead man resurrected and stood up. From this biblical account we see that the bodies of the saints do not lose their grace-filled power even after death, and this is why the Orthodox venerate the relics of those who have pleased God—as temples of the Holy Spirit, pouring forth healings for us. There are hundreds of thousands of accounts of healings worked at holy relics, which show this Orthodox custom, which for us testifies to the truth of the General Resurrection, to be pleasing to God.

The memory of the prophet Elisha is celebrated on **June 14/27**.



## THE PROPHETS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

After Elijah God raised up several other prophets in the kingdom of Israel, who rebuked paganism and proclaimed the salvation to come. The books of several of these are included in the Bible.

The first of these was Hosea (820 B.C.). The Lord commanded the prophet to marry a harlot, as a testimony to Israel's infidelity to the Lord. Hosea proclaimed that the apostates would be rejected, but that later God would spare the unpardoned and restore them to Himself. This foretells not only the conversion of the Hebrews to Christ, which is to occur before the end of the world, but primarily proclaims the conversion of the pagans to the Creator.

The sin of the Hebrews lies in bloodshed, fornication, drunkenness, oppressing the poor, and worshiping idols. God promises the apostates: *For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early.* [And they will say:] *Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth* (Hos. 5:14–6:3).

Here the prophet is proclaiming Christ's Resurrection on the third day, by which God revived all those who had repented: early in the morning He appeared to the myrrh-bearing women and with the rain of the Holy Spirit He watered the parched earth of human hearts.

But the Hebrews do not wish to heed the Creator, and the greatest sinners among them are the leaders of the people. Their riches, acquired through unrighteousness, will perish, their golden calves will be crushed, and the Hebrews themselves will be scattered throughout the nations. Calling them to repentance, the prophet says, *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you* (Hos. 10:12).

Pitying Israel, the Lord recalls the day when He called His Son out of Egypt: *In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off. When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them* (Hos. 11:1–3). This is referring to Exodus, but we see also a prophecy concerning Christ as the Progenitor of the New Israel, that is, the Church.

In His compassion God will not destroy the Hebrews, but He shall “roar like a lion,” and His sons shall tremble and fly to him from the west, from Egypt and Assyria (Hos. 11:10–11)—the pagan peoples who entered the Church. And despite all the unrighteousness of men, in His mercy God makes a tremendous promise: *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.*<sup>98</sup> *repentance shall be hid from Mine eyes* (Hos. 13:14). On the day of Pascha we saw this prophecy fulfilled: the Lord wrested men from snare of death.

The next prophet was Joel (800 B.C.). He proclaimed the terrible judgments of God, and warned people that locusts would come upon Israel, after which fire would encompass all the mountains and scorch the earth. In anticipation of this terrible day of the Lord the prophet commands that a fast be decreed and that men repent of their evil deeds: *And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil* (Joel 2:13). Joel’s greatest prophecy, however, was the proclamation of Pentecost: *I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit* (Joel 2:28–29). After this will come the day of the Judgment, when the sun will turn to darkness, and the moon to blood. But *whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call* (Joel 2:32). God will gather all the nations into the valley of Jehosaphat near Jerusalem, and there the Great Judgment will be held. After this will come the Kingdom of the Lord Himself, Who will cleanse all the sins of the saved.

Another prophet was Amos (7th century B.C.). He was a shepherd, but God called Him to be a messenger of His will. The Lord promises to punish many nations for their crimes, for the Law of God extends to all men. God especially severely condemns Israel for fornication, drunkenness, and the idol-worship into which it had sunk. God was also angered by sins of violence against the poor, bribery among the judges, and changing the value of money. The Lord sent many punishments upon the apostates, but they did not repent, and for this they are to go into captivity. Though God called all men—*Seek ye Me, and ye shall live* (Amos 5:4)—the Hebrews do not wish to leave off sinning, in spite of the approaching day of the Lord. For this God rejects all their feasts: *I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies ... Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness*

<sup>98</sup> *Translator’s note:* This passage is also rendered as “O death, where is thy sting? O hades, where is thy victory?”

as a mighty stream (Amos 5:21, 23–24). God’s punishment would be a great earthquake—the harbinger of the destruction of the kingdom of Israel.

But the greatest of Amos’ predictions was the prophecy of the Day of the Lord. The earth will tremble, the sun will set at noon, and the feasts will be turned to mourning. God will cause lamentation in the land as for an only son, and its end will be as a bitter day. And the Lord will send a famine upon the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a thirst for hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:8–11). This prediction was fulfilled on the day of Great Friday: when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross, all the wonders that Amos described came to pass.

God goes on to promise to work His Judgment, from which none will be able to flee: *Though they dig into hell, thence shall Mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down: And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence; and though they be hid from My sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent, and he shall bite them* (Amos 9:2–3). God will scatter Israel, and all the sinners will perish by the sword, but then He will restore the fallen tabernacle of David, mend its cracks, and establish it as in the days of old, so that all the nations to which the Lord’s name is proclaimed will enter therein (Amos 9:11). After this the whole world will be transfigured.

Obadiah (9th century B.C.) likewise preached in Israel—the same dignitary who saved the prophets from the wrath of Jezebel in the time of Ahab. His book is dedicated to rebuking the kingdom of Edom (and, in its person, the kingdom of this world). The Lord promises to completely crush Edom, and addressing it He says, *Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.* (Obad. 1:4). This will occur because of the pride and cruelty of Edom. And the Day of the Lord will come, when salvation will be on Mount Zion, and it will be a holy place (Obad. 1:17). And so it was on the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. The concluding promise of Obadiah states that *saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau [the pagans]; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s* (Obad. 1:21).

During the decline of the kingdom of Israel the prophet Nahum was sent (7th century B.C.). He foretold the fall of the kingdom of Assyria and its capital, Ninevah. *God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious* (Nahum 1:2), the prophet’s book begins. The Lord will destroy to its foundations the capital of iniquity, which had inflicted terror upon all the earth, and no human efforts to save the city of blood will help. But joy awaits those faithful to God: *Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off* (Nahum 1:15).

This prophecy was fulfilled in its fullness during the preaching of the apostles, who proclaimed the utter destruction of the kingdom of Satan, for he it was who had directed the iniquities of Ninevah. Ninevah itself was destroyed in 612 B.C., precisely as the prophet Nahum had described.

The Church honors the memory of these prophets.

## THE PROPHET JONAH

At the time when Israel was immersed in the darkness of paganism, its chief enemy was Assyria. Then God commanded the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, who had previously anointed Jehu to kingship and foretold victory to his grandson Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25), to go to the capital of Assyria, to Ninevah, and declare that for its evil deeds it would be destroyed after forty days.

Upon hearing this command of God, Jonah decided to flee from His face. Being a prophet he knew that Israel was to be seized by the Assyrians, and he did not wish God's sentence to be annulled. Jonah came to Joppa (now one of the regions of Tel-Aviv) and boarded a ship that was sailing for Tharsis (Spain). The ship was hardly under way when God suddenly brought a hurricane upon the sea, and the vessel was on the verge of sinking. The sailors began to pray to their gods, while Jonah fell into despondency, went below, and fell asleep.





The ship's captain went to him, poked him in the side, and said, "Why are you snoring? Rise and pray to your God. Perhaps He will remember us, and we will not perish!"

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They began to cast lots to learn who was at fault for their misfortune, and the lot fell to Jonah. He told them that he worshiped the Lord God of heaven, Who created the sea and dry land, and had decided to flee from Him.

The people were afraid, and Jonah said, "Throw me into the sea, and it will become calm."

They did not wish to, but as their situation was dire they did his bidding, asking God for forgiveness. Immediately the sea became calm, and the sailors glorified the Creator, and later accepted the true faith. Jonah was swallowed by a huge sea monster (sometimes called a whale, not in the sense of its biological classification, but in the sense of the sea monster's size). The prophet abode three days and three nights in the belly of this monster. There he prayed to the Lord, describing his sojourn in the depths of the abyss and hoping for deliverance from death. This three-day sojourn of Jonah in the belly of the whale prefigured the Savior's three-day burial and His Resurrection from the dead (Mt. 12:40). The sea monster was an ancient universal symbol of death, and deliverance from it was a natural prefiguration of the Resurrection. The Lord commanded the monster to cast Jonah on dry land. There God again commanded the prophet to complete his mission. Jonah obeyed and went to Ninevah, preaching God's judgment.

Ninevah at that time was a dreadful place. The palaces of Ninevah surpassed all that had preceded them: here all the luxury of the East was gathered, and the towers and walls of the city were covered with skin flayed from vanquished foes. At the eastern gates of the city captive kings sat in cages

on dog chains, grinding to powder the exhumed bones of their ancestors in mortars.<sup>99</sup> Human sacrifices were offered to evil spirits.

It was in this city that Jonah walked for three days, saying, “In forty days Ninevah will be destroyed.”

The Assyrians, knowing of the miracle of Jonah’s deliverance from the jaws of the monster, believed him. The king commanded that everyone undertake a strict fast, dress in ragged clothing, and sprinkle their heads with ashes. All the inhabitants left off their evil ways. Not only the adults, but even the children and animals fasted, and a loud wail went up to God. And the Lord took pity upon the people and did not inflict the promised punishments upon them. For this reason Christ promised that the Ninevites would judge those who did not repent upon hearing the preaching of the Gospel (Mt. 12:41).

Jonah was frightfully upset by this. He was afraid he would be thought a false prophet, and so he asked for death.

The prophet went outside the city walls and sat on a hill to see whether anything would happen to Ninevah. At God’s command a plant grew up over his head overnight, and Jonah was glad of its shade. The next night God sent a worm, and the plant withered, and a scorching wind came from the desert and began to burn Jonah’s head, so that he again faintheartedly asked for death.

Then God asked Jonah, “Are you truly so grieved?”

“Very grieved, to the point of death,” he replied.

“You feel pity for the plant,” the Lord said, “for which you did not labor and which you did not grow, which grew in a single night and in a single night perished. Shall I not have pity upon Ninevah, a great city, in which over a hundred and twenty thousand persons cannot tell good from evil, and numerous cattle?”

The example of Ninevah’s repentance gives any sinner hope for salvation. God’s judgments are not blind fate that does not depend on a person, and God’s promise may be kept or it may not, depending on how a person or a nation behaves.

Interestingly, the Assyrians preserved the memory of the prophet Jonah. To this day Jonah’s hill is pointed out amid the ruins of Ninevah, and three centuries before Christ’s Nativity the Babylonian priest Berossus described the man-fish Oannes who brought just laws to Mesopotamia.<sup>100</sup>

The prophet Jonah is commemorated on September 22/October 5.

His book is read in its entirety on the eve of Pascha, since it prefigures Christ’s Resurrection, and the prayer of Jonah in the belly of the whale forms the basis for the 6th ode of the canon.

<sup>99</sup> S.A. Nefedov, *History of the Ancient World*

<sup>100</sup> Berossus, *History of Babylon*, I, 1:3



## THE JUDEAN KINGDOM FROM REHOBOAM

TO AHAZ (1 Kings 14:21–15:24, 22:41–53; 2 Kings 8:16–29, 11:1–12:21, 14:1–22, 15:1–7, 32–38; 2 Chron. 11–27)

After the falling away of the ten tribes, only the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin remained under the rule of the descendants of David. Due to the worship of the calves introduced by Jeroboam, however, the majority of the Levites and many particularly pious Israelites from the other tribes moved to the Judean kingdom. Hence, unlike the kingdom of Israel, Jerusalem at various times had both righteous and unrighteous rulers. Unfortunately, the evil seed planted by Solomon bore fruit, and the impiety of the kings of the northern kingdom affected Judea as well: immediately after the division of the kingdoms idolatry and debauchery appeared there. Naturally, God did not allow the apostates in Judea to go unpunished.

Even under Rehoboam the pharaoh Shishak had come and sacked Jerusalem in punishment for its apostasy, and only Rehoboam's repentance saved Judea from utter destruction.

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To the pious kings the Creator gave victory over their more powerful enemies. Thus, King Asa routed Zarus of Ethiopia with a million warriors by the power of his prayer, but pride deprived him of God's support. Asa grew proud and did not heed the prophet Ananias. He threw him into prison, and he himself died of gangrene. Scripture says that *in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians* (2 Chron. 16:12). Thus, the Word of God prohibits depending on human efforts when ill, but rather instructs one to place all hope upon the Ruler of All, while at the same time employing medical aid. In the New Testament Church the Lord has established the sacrament of unction for healing the ill.

Another thing that God condemns is union between a pious person and an ungodly one. Later the apostle Paul would say, *Be not deceived: evil communications* [i.e., bad company] *corrupt good manners* (1 Cor. 15:33). Thus, the pious Jehosaphat of Judea, by entering into an alliance with the unrighteous Ahab of Israel, brought great evil upon his descendants. His son, married to Ahab's daughter, became an idolater, and this nearly destroyed the entire dynasty of David. His wife, Athaliah, after the death of her son destroyed all the royal children. Joash alone was saved by the high priest Jehoiada, who later brought him to power. But Joash was infected with the impure leaven of Ahab. While his savior was alive he remained faithful to God, but after his death he repaid his savior with evil: at his order his savior's son Zechariah was killed in the temple itself for a prophecy he had made through the Holy Spirit.

As Zechariah was dying he cried, "May the Lord see this and seek retribution!"



In punishment the forces of Joash were routed by the Syrians, and peace was purchased at the price of all the treasures of the temple and the palace. Then Joash himself was killed by conspirators.

Finally the Lord showed that royal power must not lay claim to what belongs to the priesthood. Thus, when King Uzziah grew proud and went into the temple intending to burn incense, God punished him, and he was stricken with leprosy. A terrible earthquake damaged the temple, and the people saw a fiery seraph flying over the city. To his dying day Uzziah remained ill, and the gift of prophecy deserted Judea for a time. Thus God showed what a terrible act is committed by those who, like the Protestants or the schismatics, attempt to usurp the right to perform sacred rites without having received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Judea's greatest fall into sin, however, occurred under King Ahaz, Uzziah's grandson. He burned his son in sacrifice to Molech, and erected a pagan temple in Jerusalem. In punishment God sent numerous enemies against him, but even then Ahaz did not turn back to the Creator, but attempted to rely on an alliance with Assyria and Egypt. Yet for the sake of the promise given to David the Lord preserved Judea and sent a great prophet who restored the worship of God: Isaiah, who is also called "the Old Testament Evangelist."

## THE CALLING OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH

**I**n the year of Uzziah's death God called one of the greatest prophets, Isaiah, to his ministry. Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne of glory, and the hem of His garment filled the whole temple. Around him stood the greatest celestial spirits, the seraphim (aflame with Divine love). Each of them had six wings: with two wings each covered his face, not daring to look upon the glory of God; with two, his feet; and with two others he flew. And they cried out to one another: *Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts*: (i.e., "the Lord of Sabaoth")! *the whole earth is full of His glory* (Is. 6:1–3).

The Church sings this hymn to this day. The threefold exclamation "Holy, holy, holy" indicates the mystery of the triune God. And the doorposts shook at the voices of those that cried, foretelling that the temple in Jerusalem would not last forever, and the house was filled with the smoke of incense, symbolizing the prayers of the saints.

When Isaiah saw this, in terror he cried, *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts* (Is. 6:5).

Then one of the seraphim was sent to him, who took took a burning coal from the altar that stood before God, touched it to the prophet's lips, and said,

“Behold, this has touched your lips, and your iniquity is removed from you, and your sin is cleansed.”

The same occurs with Christians who come to the churches, which are modeled after the heavenly sanctuary, and their sins are forgiven when they partake of Holy Communion, for it is the Body of Christ, which resembles a coal. As fire and wood are united in a coal, so Divinity and Humanity are united in Christ. The tongs are an image of the Theotokos, who bore the Divine Infant, and of the spoon from which we receive the Holy Gifts.

Then Isaiah heard the voice of God: “Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?”

Here again we see an indication of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The prophet immediately responded to the Divine summons, and the Creator foretold that because the Judean people had not wished to heed His word the earth would be emptied. But God would leave a holy remnant for the sake of which the Hebrew people would be preserved. This remnant is those descendants of Abraham who received Jesus Christ and became Christians.

This passage is read in the churches at the Meeting of the Lord, to show the eternal glory of the Divine Infant Who was brought into the temple.

## THE PROPHECY OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST (Is. 7–9, 11)

For the impiety of Ahaz, the king of Judea, God departed from him. Two kingdoms—of Israel and of Syria—concluded an alliance against Jerusalem with the intention of destroying all the descendants of King David and establishing a new dynasty. Their forces marched on the city. It appeared that God’s promise to the Psalmist would not come true.

But then the prophet Isaiah came to the despondant Ahaz with the word of God: “The plans of these kings will not come to pass and will not be fulfilled. Ask for yourself a sign from the Lord, ask either in the depth or in the height.”

King Ahaz refused: “I will not ask and will not tempt the Lord.”

Isaiah replied, *Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel* (i.e., “God is with us”—Is. 7:13–14). Isaiah said likewise that these two kings would leave the land of Israel, but that God would bring the Assyrians into the land in punishment because the Jews neglected God. But they too would not destroy Judea, for the sake of the Infant Who was to

be born. The invasion would be like a flood that would rise to the very neck. And their wings would be spread over all the land of Immanuel, but their plans would not come to pass. Understand, O ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us! Thus the Lord says to me: do not call a plot what this people calls a plot, and do not fear what they fear. The Lord of Sabaoth, Him do you keep holy; He is your fear, and He is your trembling!

Then the prophet Isaiah forbids turning to various sorcerers, mediums, and ventriloquists, and demands that all things be measured against the Law and Revelation. Otherwise all who do not obey God will be cast into prison. But in the future He will exalt Galilee of the gentiles. The people that walks in darkness will see a great light; a light will shine forth upon those living in the land of the shadow of death.

And this will occur because unto us a Child is born, and unto us a Son is given; His government is upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Messenger of the Great Council (this refers to the Pre-eternal Council of the Holy Trinity), Wonderful Counselor (of God the Father), Mighty God, Ruler, Prince of peace, Father of the age to come. There is no end to the expansion of His government or to His peace upon the throne of David and in his kingdom, that He might establish it by judgment and righteousness from henceforth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of Sabaoth shall do this!

So the great prophet foretold the birth of Christ the Savior of the Virgin, for the sake of Whose appearance the very kingdom of Judea exists. Isaiah indicates the Divine nature of the Newborn, rightly calling Him Immanuel (i.e., “God with us”). Christ will show forth to the gentiles the light of the knowledge of God, and hence will begin His preaching in Galilee, which was inhabited by the gentiles. He will free those who are beneath the shadow of death, i.e., the dead, and hence upon His shoulders He bears the sign of His authority: the Life-giving Cross, through which we receive salvation.

The final chord of this proclamation of salvation, addressed to Ahaz, is Isaiah’s words: *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse* (the father of David), *and a Branch shall grow out of his roots* (i.e., before the coming of the Messiah the descendents of David will be in the utmost abasement, and in a miraculous manner the Savior shall be born in this generation): *And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord* (for which reason Jesus was called The Anointed One, or Christ); *And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and He shall not judge after the sight of His eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of His ears: But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth: with the rod of His mouth* (the Gospel), *and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked* (the Antichrist). *And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and*

*faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse (Christ), which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest (i.e., His death) shall be glorious (Is. 11:1–10).*

Thus God Himself will save all the people. These prophecies were and continue to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom we too receive the Life-creating Spirit.

Passages from these prophecies are read at the services of Christ's Nativity and of Theophany.

## THE END OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

(2 Kings 17)

**I**n 722 B.C. Israel's northern kingdom came to an end. The last king of Israel, Hoshea, though not so impious as his predecessors (he did not prohibit his subjects from participating in the feast of Passover that Hezekiah held in Jerusalem), nevertheless continued the godless worship of the golden calves. Confident in the aid of the allied states, he ceased to pay tribute to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser. The latter arrested Hoshea and laid siege to Samaria. After three years under siege Israel's capital was taken by the new king of Assyria, Sargon, who evicted the Israelites from the Holy Land and resettled them in northern Iraq and Iran. Later the ten tribes of Israel scattered and mixed with other nations. Thus the ancient prophecy of Moses the God-seer and the other prophets was fulfilled, which foretold the punishment of the Hebrews for their departure from the Covenant with God.

In their place settlers from Syria and Iraq were brought in, who worshiped their own false gods. Then the Creator sent lions upon them in punishment. The settlers understood that God was angry with them, and they requested Hebrew priests for themselves, who taught them to worship the Lord according to the Law of Moses. Nevertheless, the settlers continued to worship their false idols as well, for they thought that Yaweh was the local god of Palestine, to be worshiped along with their other gods. This was the origin of the Samaritans, who mixed truth with falsehood.

## THE FALL OF THE ASSYRIAN KING

SENNACHERIB (2 Kings 18:13–19:37, 2 Chron. 32:1–22, Is. 36:37)

After the impious King Ahaz the pious Hezekiah came to reign in Jerusalem. He cleansed the temple that his father had defiled, restored the rite of divine worship, and was the first of the Judean kings to fulfill the command to offer sacrifices only in the temple at Jerusalem. At his summons many Israelites who had not yet been taken captive by the Assyrians came to Judea, there to observe the feast of the Passover.

But at that moment the Assyrian King Sennacherib, a most cruel and powerful ruler, brazenly attacked Judea. Hezekiah attempted to offer him a ransom, but Sennacherib's goal was the complete destruction of Judea and the entire Hebrew people. Seizing nearly all the cities in the land, he then laid siege to Jerusalem. His courtiers, the head of which was a Hebrew, the apostate Rabshakeh, stood at the walls of Jerusalem, and Rabshakeh loudly cried out in the Hebrew tongue:

"Hear what the king of Assyria says to you! You have no one upon whom to rely! Egypt will not help you! And you are wrong to hope on the Lord! Which of the gods of these lands has saved them from my hands? Do you really think then that the Lord will save you from my hands?"

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The people were silent and answered not a word. The people of Hezekiah came to him, their clothing torn in grief, and related to him the blasphemy of the Assyrian king. Then Hezekiah sent to ask the prayers of the prophet Isaiah.

"Thus says the Lord," Isaiah replied. "Fear not the words with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled Me. Behold, I shall send a spirit against him, and he shall receive a message and return to his own country. There I will defeat him with the sword."

The king of Assyria was obliged to retreat for a time to battle Pharaoh, and sent a letter to King Hezekiah in which he again blasphemed the Creator. In great grief Hezekiah went to the temple, and there, spreading out Sennacherib's letter before the sanctuary, he prayed to God for help.

Before he had even returned from the temple he was met by messengers of Isaiah, who related the Lord's word:

"That for which you prayed to Me against Sennacherib I have heard. Here is the word of the Lord concerning him: Whom did you upbraid and revile? And at Whom did you raise your voice, and upon Whom did you lift up your eyes on high? To the Holy One of Israel. You have boasted that you have destroyed great cities and made the nations weak. And you have grown proud, though you knew that I had ordained beforehand that this should come to pass. Whether you are to sit, go out, or come in, I know all, and I know your brazenness toward Me. For your brazenness toward Me and because your

arrogance has reached My ears I will place My ring into your nose and My bit into your mouth, and will return you to your own land. For out from Jerusalem shall come a remnant, and they that escape out of Mount Zion [this referred to the apostles, for whose sake the city was saved—*Auth.*]. The zeal of the Lord of Sabaoth shall do this. I will defend this city and will save it for My sake and for the sake of David, My servant.”

This occurred on the eve of the feast of the Passover. The night of Passover arrived; the sacrifice was offered in the temple and lamps were lit. The Levites sang a hymn of deliverance—Psalm 104. And behold, the Angel of the Lord descended like a flame of consuming fire, and destroyed eighty-five thousand soldiers and the commander in chief, and the captains of the army, and all the officers. And Sennacherib arose in the morning and saw that all were dead.

He returned to Ninevah, and as he was worshiping in the house of his god his own children cut him down with swords and fled to Armenia.

Thus did God punish the proud impious one who had rebelled against the Creator!

## THE ILLNESS AND DEATH OF KING HEZEKIAH

(2 Kings 20, 2 Chron. 32, Is. 38)

After this King Hezekiah fell mortally ill, and the prophet Isaiah said to him, “Thus says the Lord: write your will, for you will die; you will not recover.”

Then Hezekiah turned to the wall and wept, and prayed to God: “O Lord, remember how I walked before Your face faithfully and with a devoted heart, and did what was pleasing in Your sight.” And the king sobbed heavily.

Then God commanded Isaiah to return and declare to him His will: “I have heard your prayer, and have seen your tears. Behold, I will add to your days fifteen years, and will deliver you from the hands of the king of Assyria. And this shall be a sign for you from the Lord: the shadow of the sun will turn back ten degrees.”

And so it happened. The sun turned back, and the shadow moved backward ten degrees. The prophet Isaiah placed a lump of figs upon the pestilential boil, and the king recovered.

The grateful Hezekiah prayed to the Creator: “I was to descend into the abyss at the half of my days. I said: No more will I see the Lord, the Lord in the land of the living. My dwelling is taken away from me and carried far from me, like a shepherd’s hut; I must cut off my life like a weaver. He will cut me off from the foundation. What shall I say? He spoke, and He did as He had said. I will spend all the years of my life quietly, remembering the years of my

life, remembering the bitterness of my soul. O Lord, thus men live, and in all this is the life of my spirit. There was great bitterness, and You saved my soul from the pit of destruction, and cast all my sins behind Your back. For hades does not glorify You, and death does not praise You. One living and only one living will glorify You, as I do now; the father will proclaim Your truth to his children. The Lord will save me, and all the days of our life we will sing hymns in the house of the Lord to the sound of my stringed instruments.”

Thus God showed that there is no hard and fast predestination, no “line of fate,” but rather free cooperation between the Creator and man, in which in answer to a prayer the Lord may change a decision He had previously made.

After this miracle the Babylonian king Merodachbaladan sent a letter to Hezekiah congratulating him on his recovery and inquiring as to the reason for the miracle of the sun. But instead of glorifying God the king of Judea began to boast of his wealth.

Then the prophet Isaiah foretold that all the riches of Jerusalem would be carried away into Babylon, and the descendants of Hezekiah would be the servants of the king of Babylon, which occurred a hundred years later.

But Hezekiah humbled himself before God and admitted his guilt. The Lord said that what was foretold would take place after his death, and the king blessed the Creator. As Isaiah had foretold, Hezekiah died 15 years after his recovery.

The Church celebrates the memory of the righteous King Hezekiah on August 28/September 10.

## THE SERVANT OF THE LORD (Is. 42–61)

One of the greatest prophecies of Isaiah, for which he is called “the Old Testament Evangelist,” is his proclamation of the coming of the Servant of the Lord. This remarkable Person Himself spoke by the mouth of the prophet. The Servant of the Lord proclaims of Himself that He is the Lord, the Creator of the world, sent by God, Who holds Him by the right hand. He is anointed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim judgment to the nations, to become a light for the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to release the captives from prison. But Israel is blind and does not see His glory. However, the Lord will save the nation and He Himself will blot out their iniquities for His own sake. He is the sole King of the world, and there is no Savior but Him.

The Servant of the Lord will deliver Israel from Babylonian captivity through Cyrus (the prophet Isaiah names this Persian king 125 years before his birth), and then He will come to earth, for the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Him. He is called by God from his mother’s womb. His mouth is as





a sharp sword. He is an arrow in the quiver of God, and God is His might. He will restore the tribes of Israel and will save the Gentiles, and His salvation shall spread to the ends of the earth.

He is the Lord, the Redeemer. The people will despise and revile Him. But then kings and princes will bow down before Him. The Servant of the Lord will lead the people into places of blessedness and will lead them to springs of water. The saved will gather to Him from all the ends of the earth, even from China (the land of Sinim). He will take the spoils from the tyrant and will deliver his captives. The Servant of the Lord gives strength to the weary by His word, and the Lord will reveal all mysteries to Him. He obediently gave His back to blows and His cheeks to the smiters, and He did not hide His face from mockery and spitting. The Lord helps Him, hence He will not be put to shame. But His enemies shall be cast into the fire that they themselves kindled. The deliverance given them will be eternal, even if the heavens should disappear like smoke. He is the Comforter of men.

The prophet goes on to proclaim the preaching of the apostles:

“How lovely are the feet of the messenger who proclaims peace, who proclaims joy, who preaches salvation, who says to Zion: ‘Your God is king!’ The guards on the walls exult with joy, for they see that the Lord returns. He

calls all to come out of the perishing world and cleanse themselves, and God Himself goes before them. Behold, the Servant of God will be obedient, will be exalted, will be raised up, and will be magnified.

“How many shall marvel, gazing upon Him; how disfigured is His face, more than any man! Many nations will He cause to marvel; kings will close their mouths before Him, for they shall see what was not told them, and will learn what they had not heard.

“He went up before the Lord as a shoot from dry land (being born of the Virgin). There is neither form nor majesty in Him. He was despised and belittled before men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with sickness, and we turned our face away from Him. He was despised, and we made Him of no account. But He took upon Himself our infirmities and bore our sickness, yet we thought He was stricken and despised by God. But He was wounded for our sins and tormented for our iniquities; the punishment of our peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we have been healed. All we like sheep had strayed, each taking his own wrong path, and the Lord laid the sins of us all upon Him. He was subjected to torments, but He suffered voluntarily and did not open His mouth. Like a sheep He was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb is voiceless before his shearer, so He does not open His mouth. He was taken away from bonds and judgment, but who shall declare His generation [i.e., who will explain how He was begotten by the Father’s essence in eternity, and of the Virgin in time]?

“But He was taken away from the land of the living, and was killed for the crimes of the people. He was to share a tomb with evildoers, but He was buried with a rich man [Joseph of Arimathea], because He had committed no sin, and there was no deceit in His mouth. It pleased the Lord that He offer a sacrifice of propitiation, after which He would see an enduring posterity [the Christians]. He is the Righteous One, the Servant of God, Who will justify many through His feat and will take their sins upon Himself. Hence, God will give Him to divide the spoils of the mighty [the devil and his angels], because He gave His soul unto death and was numbered among the evildoers [when He was crucified between two thieves], and became a Mediator for criminals.

“Cry out, O barren woman [the Church of the Gentiles], for you have more children than one who has a husband [the Church of the Hebrews]. You will be granted eternal mercy, and God will lay your stones with rubies and your foundations with sapphires, your gates with jewels and your borders with precious stones. Your sons will be taught by God Himself.”

Thus the great prophet Isaiah proclaimed the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal God, Who created the world together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, then became man and taught us truth, and was given over to torture and sacrificial death, and through this He saved us. He resurrected and established the Church, to which the eternal kingdom is promised.

## THE PROPHETS OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDEA

In addition to the great Isaiah, God raised up other prophets in the kingdom of Judea who proclaimed His will, as recorded in the books of the Old Testament.

The first of these was Micah, who prophesied in the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (736–700 B.C.). He proclaimed the approach of God's wrath against Samaria and Judea. Samaria was to be left a heap of ruins (as indeed happened). All this occurred in punishment for the seizure of the fields of the poor, unjust judgments, and false prophecies.

But in the latter days the mountain of the house of the Lord was to be set at the head of the mountains and will rise above the hills: the Church of God would overcome all false religions, and all nations would come to the Creator. He would teach them His laws, for the glory of the Lord would come out of Jerusalem. With the coming of the kingdom of God all wars would cease. Micah's most important prophecy, however, is that in Bethlehem, in David's homeland, would be born the Christ, the Lord of Israel, Whose origin is from the beginning, from the days of eternity. He will shepherd His people, and the remaining brethren (the Gentiles) will return to Israel, and then there will be eternal peace in all the land. Micah concludes his prophecy with a proclamation of God's eternal mercy: *Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea* (Mic. 7:18–19).

The next prophet was Habakkuk (7th century B.C.). Once he asked God why He permitted the violence of evildoers. To this God answered him that these would be punished by an invasion of the Chaldeans. "But the Chaldeans are no less evildoers than the Hebrews!" Habakkuk replied in surprise. And standing on a guard tower he received one of the most important revelations of the Old Testament: *Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith* (Hab. 2:4). Thus the Lord showed the new path of salvation, not through good works alone, but through faith in the Savior. In his prayer Habakkuk foretold the great coming of God for the salvation of men and the Last Judgment.

The last prophet of Judea was Zephaniah (640–609 B.C.). He likewise proclaimed the coming of the Day of Judgment, which will be a day of wrath, sorrow, and darkness. Nothing will be able to save a man from the punishment of the Lord. To be saved one must repent sincerely; impious cities and nations will be destroyed. In place of the rebels God will call the Gentiles to Himself, to whom pure lips will be given that they might glorify Him. The Lord will come to Israel as King; He will forgive all sins and drive out enemies.

**KING MANASSEH** (2 Kings 21:1–18, 2 Chron. 33:1–9)

**T**he most pious King Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, Manasseh. It is remarkable to note just how greatly the actions of the son contrasted with those of his father. Manasseh restored all the high places (the sacrificial altars on the hills), and worshiped Baal and Astarte. He defiled the temple of the Lord, building pagan temples there and establishing a brothel. Manasseh was involved in divination and sorcery, and sacrificed his son to idols. On every corner in Jerusalem altars were erected to evil spirits.

The prophets rebuked the king, and in revenge he put them to death. The greatest prophet in Judea, Isaiah, was sawn in half with a wooden saw. Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it from end to end.

In His anger the Lord said, “Because of what Manasseh has done I will bring about such a misfortune that both the ears of all who hear of it will ring. I will stretch the measuring line of Samaria over Jerusalem and will wipe it out as a cup is wiped out; they will wipe it out and overturn it, and will give the remnant over into the hands of its enemies.”

Manasseh incited a rebellion against Assyria. In punishment for his sins God sent the military commanders of the king of Assyria, who took him prisoner and placed him in shackles and fettered him with chains. Then, acknowledging his guilt, he began to pray to God, and the Lord forgave the evildoer, freeing him from captivity. Thus the Lord showed an astounding example of His mercy: He is prepared to forgive even so great a sinner as Manasseh, if only he repents.

The king of Judea returned to Jerusalem and attempted to set right the wrongs he had done. His prayer became part of our own penitential worship service—the order of great compline.

But the terrible deed that Manasseh had done affected the whole fate of Judea. Many Hebrews were led astray by him, and his son Amon returned to the paganism of his father. And God’s punishment was not long in coming.

**KING JOSIAH** (2 Kings 22–23, 2 Chron. 34–35)

**J**ust before the end of the kingdom of Judea, however, God sent correction to the people: Josiah, one of the most pious of the kings, ascended the throne of David, and he crushed the idols that Manasseh and his son Amon had erected. Not content with this, King Josiah undertook an expedition to the lands of the former kingdom of Israel. In Bethel the king destroyed the gold-

en calf and burned the bones of its priests upon it. Thus the prophecy that had been spoken back in the time of Jeroboam was fulfilled.

At Josiah's command restoration efforts were begun in the temple in Jerusalem, which had been defiled by idol worship. During the restoration a scroll of the Pentateuch written in Moses' own hand was found. It had been a long time since the Word of God had been heard in the royal court. When Josiah read the words of the Law he was horrified, seeing the abyss into which Judea was plummeting. At his request the high priest went to the prophetess Huldah for advice.

"Thus says the Lord," she said. "I will bring misfortune upon this place, and upon its inhabitants all the curses written in the book which you have read [Lev. 26, Deut. 28]. And My anger has grown hot against this place, and will not be extinguished. Tell the king that for his repentance I will not bring about these misfortunes in his lifetime."

Then Josiah commanded that the elders and all the people be assembled in the temple. There, on behalf of all the Jews, the king made a covenant with God and promised to keep all His commandments. Judea solemnly observed the feast of Passover.

To the end of his life King Josiah was faithful to God, but the people did not wish to abandon paganism, and hence God's wrath was not diverted. At that time the pharaoh Necho declared war on Assyria, and in the valley of Megiddo he killed the pious king. The prophet Jeremiah mourned the last righteous king of Judea, and after this the death throes of the southern kingdom began.

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## THE PROPHET JEREMIAH AND THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (2 Kings 23–24, 2 Chron. 36, Jer., Lam.)

**A**fter the death of Saint Josiah the throne fell to impious kings who reigned but briefly.

Jehoahaz was arrested by the pharaoh Necho and killed in Egypt. His successor Jehoiakim was subdued by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who led the first party of Jews away into captivity. At that time the country was under constant attack from both its neighbors and the great armies of Egypt and Babylon, in punishment for the innocent blood shed by Manasseh and for the idolatry of the people. Jehoiakim's son Jeconiah was taken captive and led away into Babylon along with many nobles and tradesmen. It was at this same time that Nebuchadnezzar carried off the vessels of the temple, and Jeconiah's uncle Mattaniah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had renamed Zedekiah, was appointed in his stead. This was the last king of Judea.

God sent the great prophet Jeremiah to His people to call them to repentance, but the people did not wish to listen. The Hebrews said, “We have the temple of the Lord here, so no misfortune will befall us!”

To these words God replied through Jeremiah, “Behold, you rely on deceitful words that will be of no help to you. How is this? You steal, kill, and commit fornication, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods, and then come to the temple and think you are saved, only to continue doing the same? Has not this house become for you as a den of thieves? I will reject this place and this city. And do not ask on behalf of this people, for I will not listen.”

Upon hearing the prophet’s prophecies the people not only did not repent, but began conspiring against him to kill him. Then God commanded him to show several signs of the coming misfortune. Jeremiah was commanded not to marry, so as not to be deprived of his children. Then God led the prophet to a potter, and the clay vessel broke in the potter’s hands, after which he made a new one. Thus God showed that if Israel would repent He would annul His sentence. But the people replied, “We will act according to the stubbornness of our evil hearts.”

Then God commanded him to break a pitcher before the city gates and to speak His word: “I will bring misfortune upon this place such that both ears of whoever hears of it shall ring, and will fill this place with corpses because they departed from Me. As this pitcher is broken, so Jerusalem will be turned to ruins.”

When Jeremiah stood at the gates of the temple and did as God had commanded him, the priest Pashur struck him and put the prophet in the stocks. Then the saint declared that in punishment Pashur would die in exile.

When the king wished to learn from the prophet whether God would help the Hebrews, the prophet spoke God’s words to him: “I will turn back your weapons, and I myself will war against the city, and it will be burned.”

Then God commanded Jeremiah to speak the word of the Lord in the courtyard of the temple, so that the people would repent. But the prophet was seized and thrown into prison. The people even wished to kill him, but pious men defended him.

Another time God commanded Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe, to write down his words and read them before all in the temple. The scroll was read to King Jehoiakim, but he burned it with fire, thereby refusing to obey the explicit command of the Creator.

Many false prophets deceived the people, telling them that the Lord would defend the Hebrews, but Saint Jeremiah rebuked their falseness. Thus, according to his prophecy the false prophet Hananiah perished.

Jeremiah foretold that the Babylonian captivity would last for seventy years. Most importantly, however, the time would come when God would establish a New Testament with the house of Israel. He would place the law

into men's hearts and would be their God, and they would be His people; all of them would know the Lord, and He would forgive their iniquities. All this came to pass when the Lord Jesus Christ concluded the New Testament with us in His Blood and placed into us the Holy Spirit.

As the prophet had foretold, Jerusalem was besieged by the armies of the Chaldeans. Jeremiah was imprisoned, and the hard-hearted military commanders demanded that he be severely punished, as he was considered unpatriotic and a "naysayer." Then Zedekiah, the king of Judea, in his cowardice delivered the prophet into their hands. They threw him into a well filled with filth, but then at the request of those who remained faithful to God Jeremiah was pulled back out and held in a cellar until the city was taken.

In the meantime Jerusalem was under siege, which lasted for three years. A terrible famine seized the inhabitants, leading even to cannibalism. On March 16, 597 B.C., the city was taken. King Zedekiah fled, but was caught and brought before King Nebuchadnezzar. His eyes were gouged out, but his life was spared, as the prophet Jeremiah had foretold. His children, along with the military commanders, the high priest, and several others, were executed, and the people were relocated to Babylon. The city and the temple were burned. As he sat in the smoldering ruins, watching a jackal worry a corpse on the ruins of the sanctuary, the prophet wept for his city.

The remaining unfortunates fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. There he spoke out against the continued idolatry of the Jews, and for this they killed him. There is a tradition according to which 250 years later Alexander of Macedonia relocated the relics of the holy prophet Jeremiah to the city of Alexandria.

## THE RIGHTEOUS JOB

**I**n the land of Uz (which some believe to have been located in Syria) there lived one of the greatest saints of old: Job, a fifth-generation descendant of Abraham through Esau. He was righteous and blameless in God's sight, and the Creator endowed him with tremendous riches and with seven sons and three daughters, for whom he offered sacrifices every week.

One day the sons of God came to stand before the Lord, and with them came Satan. Then the Lord asked the fallen angel, "Have you taken note of My servant Job? There is none like him on earth. He is a blameless, just, God-fearing man, one who shuns evil."

Then Satan answered, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Do You not preserve him, and have You not given him riches? But lay Your hand upon what he has, and will he bless You then?"





Then God permitted Job to be deprived of all that he had. Satan took away all his cattle, and with the force of a hurricane brought down his house upon his children's heads, causing their deaths. Then the righteous one rent his clothes and said, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21–22).

Thus Job overcame the first temptation: the lust of the flesh (the temptation of possessions and love for one's children), and remained faithful to God. But his misfortunes were not over.

Once again the devil stood before the face of God, and the Lord said to him, "Behold, even now Job is firm in his blamelessness, yet you would have had Me destroy him without a cause."

"Skin for skin, but a man will give all he has in exchange for his life," the enemy replied.

“Behold, he is in your hands, only spare his life,” the Lord consented, wishing the immortal spirit to be conquered by a mortal man, thereby foretelling the destruction of his dominion.

Then Satan brought a terrible illness upon Job: leprosy, which causes the victim to rot alive. Job went outside the city and sat upon ashes, and began scraping his wounds with a potsherd, and the city riffraff mocked him, spitting on him and laughing.

Then his wife said to him, “How long will you be faithful to God? Curse Him and die.”

But Job replied, “You speak like a foolish woman. Are we really to accept good things from God, but not evil things?”

Thus Job again proved righteous before the Lord. He overcame the temptation to rise up in rebellion against God, and thus overcame pride.

Then Satan attacked him with particular cunning: three of Job’s friends came to him, and tried to convince him that since he was suffering he must be guilty, and hence must ask God’s forgiveness. They said that the world is good in its current state, and evil is an inherent part of human nature. Job ought to reconcile himself to this and not attempt to know the Creator. They cited Revelation, the tradition of their ancestors, and common sense.

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But the righteous one did not wish to be reconciled to evil. He cursed the day of his birth that had brought him into a world permeated with death and decay. Job saw the frightful injustice that reigns in the universe, and he passionately wished to learn from God why the righteous suffer while sinners prosper, and for what he himself was being punished. He recognized the Lord’s might and His power, but doubted the justice of how the world was ordered. Job wished to bring his case against God, not acknowledging his punishment to be merited, though he was aware of the sins of his youth and the ancient defilement of original sin. With all his heart he desired to meet the Lord, recognizing that only the Creator Himself could satiate his heart. He contended with God, wishing to force Him Who cannot be forced to reveal himself. Wishing for a Mediator Who would unite him with God, Job cried out, *For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another* (Job 19:25–27).

His friends failed to break the righteous one, and then Elihu corrected Job, showing him that he had forgotten the unknowable and creative power of God, and that answers to his questions were not possible. The Lord teaches a man in an effort to prevent his destruction, and sufferings are frequently a means of teaching men.

Here the Creator Himself intervened in the argument. He accepted Job’s conditions, and appearing in a whirlwind He called upon Job to answer the

questions that He would put to him. God asked the righteous one: does he know how the universe is arranged, or does he understand how the elements of the world serve Him, working vengeance upon the impious? Is he capable of crushing the evil of the world, of ruling the heavens, or of establishing the rules of laws upon the earth? Then the Lord showed how He delights in the freedom of the living beings that have come forth from His hands, and that in various ways He directs both the inanimate world and living creatures. Finally the Almighty showed Job the true reason for his sufferings: Satan, whom He described in the form of two monsters—a behemoth and a leviathan. The free mindlessness of the rebellious angel and the people whom he has ensnared produce the maelstrom of death which so troubles Job. But this state will not last forever. God Himself will intervene in the great battle and crush Satan and all his forces for all time.

In ecstasy Job placed his hand upon his lips and repented in dust and ashes, crying out:

“I know that You can do all things and that Your intention cannot be prevented. I spoke of what I did not understand. Before I only heard of You, but now my eyes see You.”

Then God addressed Job’s friends and said that He was angry with them for not having spoken of Him so accurately as Job had. Only a sacrifice offered by the latter saved them from death. After this God restored to Job twice as much wealth, and richly blessed him with children.

In the life of the righteous Job we see a striking example of patience, through which we must become capable of seeing God even through pain and suffering, remembering that the Lord Himself united Himself to us in our grief, to the point of death on the Cross. Job is a prefiguration of Christ. Like our Lord, through the machinations of the devil he went from the peak of power to terrible humiliation. Like Christ, Job suffered outside the walls of his home, spat upon, humiliated by his closest friends, accused of blasphemy, forgotten (or so he thought) by God Himself. But the Lord justified the righteous one and restored his property to him, just as Jesus Christ rose from the dead and received the whole world from the Father for His dominion.

## THE PROPHET DANIEL INTERPRETS THE DREAM OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR (Dan. 1–2)

When Nebuchadnezzar led a part of the Hebrews away from Jerusalem into captivity, he ordered one of his noblemen to select children of royal lineage to be brought up as future Babylonian officials. The king allotted them

daily meals from the royal table, and commanded that they be taught the wisdom of the Chaldeans. Among them were four youths—Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. They decided not to defile themselves with the royal delicacies (which might have been offered to idols), and asked that they be given vegetables and water instead of the royal food. After ten days of this fast the friends proved more healthy than those who ate from the royal table. Then their overseer began taking the royal repasts for himself, and continued to feed the youths with vegetables and water. God rewarded the friends for their labor of fasting with knowledge and wisdom, and to Daniel He also gave the gift of understanding visions and dreams. When the king tested the youths they proved more intelligent than all their peers and all the wise men of the court.

One day King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled his spirit, but when he awoke he could not remember it. Then he commanded his interpreters of dreams and various adepts of the occult arts—magicians, sorcerers, and soothsayers—to tell him his dream and its meaning. They replied that none but the gods could do such a thing. Nebuchadnezzar was furious and ordered that all the wise men of Babylon be executed. Then Daniel approached the captain of the bodyguard and asked that he be taken to the king, for God, through the prayers of his friends, had revealed to him the king's dream.

When Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar he said, "The mystery that the king wishes to know could not be revealed by soothsayers and magicians. But God exists, Who is able to reveal mysteries. He revealed to the king what would come after him. You saw an enormous idol standing in tremendous brilliance, and its appearance was frightful: its head was of gold, its breast and arms—of silver, its belly and hips—of copper, and its legs were part iron, part clay. Suddenly a stone separated from a mountain, without the aid of human hands, and struck the iron and clay legs of the idol such a blow that they disintegrated. And a wind carried them away, so that no trace was left of the idol, and the stone became a great mountain that filled the earth. This was the dream, and its interpretation is this: you, O king, (and the whole kingdom of Babylon) are the head of gold. After you will come a kingdom that will be beneath yours [the Medo-Persian empire—539–333 B.C.]; this is the silver breast and arms. The third kingdom is the copper [the Greek empire—333–64 B.C.]. The fourth kingdom will be iron, because it will crush and subjugate all other kingdoms to itself [the Roman Empire, 64 B.C.—1453 A.D.]. Then it will be divided in two [395 A.D.], which will split into several kingdoms, a part of which will be strong as iron, and others of which will be weak as clay. They will attempt to unite through an alliance of men, but will not be able to, just as iron does not mix with clay. During these kingdoms God will raise up a kingdom that

will never be destroyed, and which will itself destroy all the kingdoms of the earth.”

In the words describing how the stone separated from the mountain without the help of hands and destroyed the iron, copper, clay, silver, and gold, the Church sees a prophecy that the eternal King will be born without the aid of a husband from the Virgin, and His kingdom will be eternal.

Then the king bowed down before Daniel and burned fragrances before him, and glorified the Lord as the God of gods, the Master of kings, and the Revealer of mysteries. At Daniel’s request Nebuchadnezzar appointed his three friends over the affairs of the Babylonian kingdom, while the prophet himself remained at the king’s court.

### THE THREE YOUTHS IN THE FIERY FURNACE (Dan. 3)

**K**ing Nebuchadnezzar built an enormous gold idol measuring thirty meters high and three meters wide. At his command all the military commanders, wise men, and judges—the cream of society—were assembled to worship

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the idol that the king of Babylon had built. A herald loudly proclaimed: "To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages! that at the time when you hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, tambourines, and all kinds of musical instruments, you shall fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall that same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

When they heard the sounds of the orchestras the people fell upon their faces before the golden idol. Several of the Chaldeans, however, informed on the Jews, reporting that they had refused to pay homage to the idol. Then Nebuchadnezzar's wrath was kindled, and three youths were brought to him.

"Is it true that you do not wish to worship the idol that I have erected?" he asked them. "Be prepared to worship the idol at the sounds of the orchestra; otherwise you will be cast into the fiery furnace. And where is the God that will deliver you from my hands?"

The youths rejected his command. "There is need for us to answer this. In the heavens there is God, Who is able to save us from the fire, but even if this does not occur, know that we do not serve your gods, and we will not worship your idol."

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The king became enraged. His face was contorted, and he ordered that they be cast into the flame. They were shackled and cast into the furnace. At the king's command the furnace was heated seven times hotter than usual, and the flames towered twenty-five meters above it. They were so intense that they consumed the executioners themselves. The three youths stood in the fire, but the fire did not touch them: the Angel of the Lord descended into the furnace with them and cast out the flame from its center. Instead of the fire they were surrounded by a wind filled with dew, and then the three youths blessed the Lord and, raising a hymn together, called upon all creation to give praise to the Creator.

Nebuchadnezzar stared into the flame, and asked his courtiers in amazement, "Did we not cast three into the furnace? Where then did the fourth come from, whose appearance is like unto the Son of God?"

Then he approached the door of the furnace and called them. They came out untouched by the fire, so that even their clothing bore no smell of smoke. The king glorified them and blessed the Creator, Who saves His faithful servants.

The miracle of the deliverance of the three youths prefigured the salvation of all the righteous from the fires of hell by the power of the Eternal Messenger of the Father, Jesus Christ. Thus the Lord promised to save us through faith. Great is the miracle of the faith of these youths! It proved more powerful than the might of the elements. So also Christians can do all things by the power of Christ through faith in the Savior.

## THE PUNISHMENT OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR (Dan. 3:98 — 4:34)

After Nebuchadnezzar grew so proud that he erected an idol in his own honor, God punished him severely. He had a dream that no one was able to explain for him. The king saw a tall tree upon which numerous fruits bloomed and in which birds were living, and beneath which beasts made their home.

Suddenly a Watcher and a Holy One descended from the heavens and said, “Cut down this tree and lop off its branches; let the birds fly away, and let the beasts scatter. But let the stump of its roots alone remain in the earth, bound by shackles. Its portion shall be with the beasts. Its human heart shall be taken away from it, and the heart of a beast shall be given it, until seven seasons pass over it. This is decreed by the command of the Watchers, and appointed by the sentence of the Holy Ones, that all may know that the Most High rules over the nations and gives the kingdom to whomsoever He wishes.”

Then the king invited the prophet Daniel to come and interpret the dream for him.

Daniel sorrowfully said, “Your dream be to them that hate you, and its interpretation to your enemies! The tree is you, O king, to whom God gave all power. But you have grown proud against Him. For this reason you will be cut off from men, and the grass will feed you like a bull, until seven seasons pass, and until you learn that God alone rules over the kingdoms and gives them to whomsoever He wishes. But your kingdom will be left you when you learn the power of Heaven. Hence, I advise you to redeem your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by mercy upon the poor. This is what is able to prolong your peace.”

But the king paid no heed to Daniel’s advice.

A year later, as he was walking in the royal court, he said, “Is this not the great Babylon that I have built by the power of my might and to the glory of my greatness?”

And immediately a voice from heaven declared his sentence: “Your kingdom is taken from you, and you will live with the beasts of the field, until you learn that the Most High rules over the nations and gives the kingdom to whomsoever He wishes.”

Immediately the king lost his mind, tore off his clothing, and ran away into the forest. He ate grass like a bull, and his body was watered with dew from heaven, so that he grew hair like a lion, and talons like those of a bird. And seven seasons passed over him (i.e., three and a half years).

After this his sanity was restored, and Nebuchadnezzar lifted up his eyes to heaven and blessed and glorified the Ever-existent One, Whose dominion is eternal. He understood that all who live upon the earth are of no significance, that only the Lord does what He wishes both in heaven and on



earth, and that none may say to Him, “What have You done?” He has power to humble those who walk with pride.

After this prayer his courtiers found him, and Nebuchadnezzor returned to the royal throne. This story teaches us how God humbles the proud, however powerful they may be.

## THE PROPHECY OF EZEKIEL

**I**n their Babylonian captivity God did not leave His people, and raised up new prophets for them. One of the great prophets was Ezekiel. Once God appeared to him in a terrible form, astride living celestial beings—the cherubim—which appeared as a lion, an eagle, a bull, and a man. These spirits shown like lightning, and living wheels covered with eyes moved about them. Above these highest of the spirits was something akin to a crystal vault with a sapphire throne, above which, too brilliant for the eye to behold, was something resembling a man. Thus the prophet saw a likeness of the glory of the Son of God before the Incarnation.

God commanded the prophet to go and proclaim to the people His righteous judgments, to show them the reason for the punishment that had overtaken Jerusalem, and to call all sinners to repentance.

“I do not desire the death of a sinner,” God said. “Rather, return to Me and live.”

God described to the prophet the fall of Jerusalem and its future restoration, the judgment upon the pagan nations, and the destruction at the end of time of the great apostate nations Gog and Magog. Through Ezekiel’s lips the coming of the eternal kingdom of the Descendent of David, the Messiah, was proclaimed.

Once the Lord led the prophet into an enormous field covered with dry bones, and asked him, “Will these bones come to life?”

“You know this, O Lord!” Ezekiel replied.

Then God commanded him to prophesy to the bones. And as soon as the saint had spoken the word of God a terrible earthquake began. The bones began sliding together, and became covered with flesh and skin, but there was no spirit in them. Then God commanded the prophet to prophesy to the Spirit:

“From the four winds come, O Spirit, and breathe upon these killed ones, and they shall live.”

And so it happened: a great multitude of people returned to life stood before the eyes of God, Who promised to gather His people into the Holy

Land and to lead the dead out of the tombs. This great prophecy would come to pass on the day of the Resurrection.

Finally Ezekiel was shown the eternal Temple of God—an image of the Church, in which the Messiah will offer sacrifice to His Father. Ezekiel saw that the eastern gates of the Temple were closed forever, because God had entered in by them. Thus he forelearned the mystery of the eternal virginity of the Mother of God.

Ezekiel likewise saw a great river reviving the world, that flowed from the Temple—an image of the Holy Spirit, Who was to renew the universe.

The mysteries revealed to Ezekiel continue to unfold to this day. He saw the far-off future and the renewal of the universe that had been poisoned by sin and death.

### BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST (Dan. 5)

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar, several successors later, Nabunaid ascended the throne, making Belshazzar his co-ruler and king of Babylon.

Once Belshazzar held a feast for a great many of his nobles, and drank wine in their presence. When he had become drunk, he ordered that the sacred vessels be brought from Solomon's Temple, and together with his wives, concubines, and nobles he drank wine from the sacred vessels and glorified the idols.

Suddenly, he saw before him a hand, which began writing strange words upon a limestone wall next to a lit lantern. The king was terrified; his face went white, the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees shook with fear. He cried out for all the wise men and magicians to be brought, that they might interpret the inscription for him. But the wise men could explain nothing, once again showing the demons' impotence before the Revelation of God.

Then the king's mother reminded him of Daniel, who had been an advisor to his father Nebuchadnezzar, and the prophet came to the festal chamber. Belshazzar promised to show him great honors and to make him his co-ruler if he could decipher the inscription.

But Daniel replied, "Keep your gifts, and give your rewards to another. But I will tell you the meaning of the inscription. Your father Nebuchadnezzar received great power from God, but when he grew proud he was deprived of his mind, and like a beast he fed on grass for seven seasons, until he had learned that the Most High rules the nations and gives power to whomsoever He wishes. You also know this, but you did not humble your heart, instead exalting yourself against the Lord of the heavens, and you defiled the vessels of His house. You drank wine from them and glorified the voiceless idols, but



God, who holds your breath in His hand, you did not glorify. For this cause was the hand sent to you, and this inscription written. Here is what is written: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* [Dan. 5:25]. *Mene*—God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. *Tekel*—you have been weighed on the scales and been found to be very lightweight. *Peres*—your kingdom is divided between the Medes and the Persians.”

Then Belshazzar, wishing to mollify God, clothed Daniel in purple, placed a golden chain about his neck, and declared him the third ruler in the kingdom. But this was to no avail, for God cannot be bribed. That very night Belshazzar was killed by the Persians, who had taken Babylon led by Cyrus.

### DANIEL IN THE LION’S DEN (Dan. 6)

Cyrus appointed Darius the Mede vassal ruler, while he continued to wage war. Darius decided to appoint a hundred and twenty satraps to rule the country, and three princes to rule them. One of the three princes appointed was Daniel.

Then, moved by envy, the princes and satraps decided to do away with Daniel, but as he was beyond reproach they said, "We will be unable to find a pretense against Daniel unless we find it against him in the law of his God."

Then they approached Darius and proposed that he issue an edict that if anyone should pray to anyone besides the king, he was to be cast into a pit of lions. Succumbing to vainglory the king agreed. It should be noted that the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be reversed. Daniel learned of the edict, went to his house, and, opening a window in his chamber that faced Jerusalem, prayed to God and glorified Him thrice a day upon his knees, as he had done before (hence the Christian custom of praying at 9:00 AM, 12:00 PM, and 3:00 PM).

Then those envious men spied Daniel praying and reported him to King Darius. The king was very grieved, but could do nothing to save the prophet, for the laws were irreversible. Then Darius said to Daniel, *Thy God whom thou servest continually, He will deliver thee* (Dan. 6:16).

And Daniel was cast into the pit with the lions, and a stone was placed over the top, sealed by the king and the nobles, so that none could save Daniel. Darius was very downcast and went to sleep without supper. All that night he was tormented by sleeplessness.

Early in the morning he ran to the pit, and cried out pitifully, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God, Whom you serve continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

Then he heard Daniel's voice from the pit: "O king, live forever! God sent His Angel, and He closed the lions' mouths, and they did me no harm, because I was found pure in His sight; nor have I committed any crime against you, O king."

Then the king rejoiced exceedingly and ordered that Daniel be taken out, and he was found to be unharmed, because he had believed in his God.

Then his slanderers were brought, and they themselves were cast into the pit, and before they even reached the bottom the lions had torn them to pieces. Darius then issued an edict commanding all to give reverence to the God of Daniel, for He is the living God Who is ever-existing, and His Kingdom is unbreakable, and His dominion is unending. He delivers and saves, He performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, and He had delivered Daniel from death.

This wondrous deliverance of the prophet symbolized the death and Resurrection of Christ the Savior. As Daniel was punished for fidelity to God, so the Lord went to the Cross out of obedience to His Father. As the prophet descended into the pit to the predators, as though into the very den of death, where there was no means of escape known to man, so also Christ descends into the depths of death, into hades, which since ancient times has

been symbolized by a pit of stone. The lions are the murderers of old, the demons, whose prince, the devil, is called a roaring lion that walks about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). The stone lying upon Daniel's pit and sealed by the king and his nobles prefigured the stone that lay upon the tomb of Christ, sealed by the high priests (Mt. 27:43). An angel descends to Daniel in the pit, and angels accompany Christ as He descends into the abyss. But He Himself, the Angel of the Great Council of God, closes the jaws of the demons. As Daniel came out of the place of death unharmed, so also the Lord comes out of the tomb alive. As the enemies of the prophet perish, so also all who deny Christ are given over by Him to be torn to pieces by the demons.

### THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE (1 Ezra, Neh., Hag., Zech., 2 Macc. 1)

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The seventy years of Babylonian captivity that the prophet Jeremiah foretold had passed. As the prophets had said, the Persians captured Babylon. The Persian king Cyrus, whose name Isaiah specified two centuries before his birth, issued an edict returning the Hebrews to Palestine, and commanded that the temple be restored.

The community that returned was headed by Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. They restored the destroyed altar and offered sacrifice to God upon it. In order to perform the whole-burnt offering, sacred fire that had been preserved since the times of Moses and Solomon was required. The priests who had been led away into captivity had hidden it in a well, but there the resettled Hebrews found only water. When this water was poured upon the sacrifice and the wood, they burst into flame, and the sacrifice was consumed.

Though God had manifested so great a miracle, the construction of the temple was delayed by opposition from the Samaritans. The Persian king Artaxerxes forbade its construction, and so the Hebrews went about setting their own houses in order. But God raised up two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah (500 B.C.), who demanded that the temple be restored.

The prophet Haggai proclaimed, *Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built ... Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? ... Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but*

*there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes ... Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified* (Hag. 1:2, 4–6, 8).

Then Zarubabbel and Joshua put aside their fear and began building the temple. When they were laying its foundation the people were divided: some sang with joy, while others wept, remembering the beauty of Solomon's temple. Then God made a promise through Haggai: "Take courage, all you people of the earth, and perform the work, for I am with you. My covenant that I made in Egypt and My Spirit abide among you! Once again—and this will soon come to pass—I will shake heaven and earth, sea and dry land, and will shake all the nations, and the Desire of all the nations will come, and I will fill this House with glory. Silver is mine, and gold is mine, says the Lord. The glory of the latter temple will be greater than that of the first, and in this place I will give you peace."

Thus the prophet foretold that it was this second temple to which the Savior of all men would come, Who would lead those who believed into an unshakable kingdom. For nineteen years construction of the temple continued, and at last it was completed. On the eve of Passover the temple was consecrated, though Jerusalem lay in ruins.

Then God sent the priests Ezra and Nehemiah from Babylon. They rebuilt the city walls and began teaching the people the Law of God. They took particular care to dissolve marriages between the Hebrews and foreigners, who were inclining Israel to apostasy.

At that time the prophecy concerning the people of God was fulfilled. The prophet Zechariah foretold the coming of Christ the Lord, Whom he called "the Branch" (Zech. 3:8), to which many nations would gather (Zech. 8:20–23). The Lord would enter Jerusalem riding on an ass's colt, to save the prisoners from the waterless pit, i.e., hades (Zech. 9:9–11). But the Hebrew nation would reject their God. The Lord said, *And I said unto them, If ye think good, give Me My price [for caring for you]; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord* (Zech. 11:12–13).

And so it occurred, when the high priests bought the life of Jesus Christ from Judas for thirty pieces of silver.

But later the Jews will repent of their evil deed and will weep over Him Whom they pierced. Then will be revealed to them a spring to cleanse their sin and impurity (Zech. 12:10, 13:1). God will ascend upon the Mount of Olives and will judge all the nations, but before this there will be a special day when the sun will set at noon, and the light will not appear until the evening. Living waters of the Spirit will flow from Jerusalem, and the Lord will be the sole King over all the earth (Zech. 14).

All these prophecies were fulfilled in Christ, and they will reach their conclusion at the end of the world.

The last of the Old Testament prophets was Malachi (approx. 400 B.C.). He foretold that Christ the Savior would come into the second temple, preceded by John the Baptist (Mal. 3:1–3). And before the Second Coming of Christ the prophet Elijah will be sent, to convert the hearts of the Hebrews to the Christians (Mal. 4:5–6).

After Malachi the prophetic ministry left Israel for four centuries, until it was renewed in the greatest of the Lord's messengers—John the Baptist, whose coming was foretold by the last of the prophets of old.

Soon after his repose the Old Testament Church completed the canon of its Scriptures.

## THE MACCABEAN MARTYRS AND THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (1 and 2 Macc.)

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After the construction of the second temple and the restoration of Jerusalem were completed, Israel lived as an autonomous community headed by a high priest. Initially Palestine was under the authority of the Persians, after which in 332 B.C. the Holy Land was conquered by Alexander of Macedonia. The great conqueror was joyfully met by the high priests, and he offered sacrifice to the One God in the Temple. After his death, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel (Dan. 7:6, 8:1–22, 11:2–4), his kingdom was divided into four parts.

Palestine passed from the hands of Syria into the hands of Egypt, then back again. In 167 B.C. King Antiochus Epiphanes, then ruler of Palestine, decided to unite all nations through worship of the false Greek gods. Thus the ancient prediction of the prophet Daniel was fulfilled (Dan. 8:23–26, 11). The Hebrews were forced to worship idols and to eat animals forbidden by the Law. Those who practiced circumcision were executed, and a statue of Zeus was erected in the temple itself. Most terrible of all, the apostate high priest Jason encouraged this.

Many Israelites, however, remained faithful to the Creator. One scribe, named Eleazar, who was 90 years old, was force-fed forbidden meat, but he spat it out, not wishing to violate God's Law. It was proposed to him that he eat ordinary meat instead of unclean meat, merely to fulfill the king's command.

But the courageous elder replied, "I will not act hypocritically, lest the youth be led astray by my apostasy. Though I should escape sufferings from men at the present time, I will not escape the right hand of the Almighty



either in this life or in the next. It is better therefore that I leave for all an example of dying courageously for the sake of the holy Commandments.”

He was beaten to death with whips. As he endured the blows Eleazar prayed to God that He bear witness to his faithfulness.

After this seven brothers, disciples of Eleazar, were arrested together with their mother Solomonia. Their names were Abim, Antonius, Gurias, Eleazar, Eusebonus, Alimus, and Marcellus. The brothers, like their teacher, were tortured in an attempt to force them to eat what was forbidden and to deny God. The first was ordered to be fried in an enormous pan in view of all. The second was treated likewise. When Antoninus was dying, he said, *You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for His laws* (2 Macc. 7:9).

When the hands of the third were to be chopped off, Gurias held them out, saying, *I got these from Heaven, and because of His laws I disdain them, and from Him I hope to get them back again* (2 Macc. 7:11).

When the fourth was being executed, he said to the king, *One cannot but choose to die at the hands of men and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by Him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!* (2 Macc. 7:14).

The fifth, Eusebonus, looked at the king as he was being executed and said, *Because you have authority among men, mortal though you are, you do what you please. But do not think that God has forsaken our people. Keep on, and see how his mighty power will torture you and your descendants!* (2 Macc. 7:16–17).

As Alimus was dying he said, *Do not deceive yourself in vain. For we are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God. Therefore astounding things have happened. But do not think that you will go unpunished for having tried to fight against God!* (2 Macc. 7:18–19).

Their mother acted with astounding courage. Gazing upon the terrible tortures of her children she enjoined them to endure the sufferings: *I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, Who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in His mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of His laws* (2 Macc. 7:22–23).

Antiochus, interpreting the brothers' replies to be mocking him, began trying to sway the youngest, promising to make him rich and to make him a great dignitary. When he would not listen, the king began to press their mother to urge her son to apostasy. Solomonia did urge her son, in these words: *My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the*

*heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers (2 Macc. 7:27–29).*

Behold an example of true maternal love, prepared to sacrifice all for God's sake, and thereby to secure eternal good things for her children!

The youngest son likewise rebuked the king and promised that he would be punished so severely that the torments would oblige Antiochus himself to glorify the Creator. With these words he died, after which their mother also was executed. This took place on August 1, 166 B.C.

The king indeed did not escape God's punishment: after his forces were routed in Persia he decided to destroy Jerusalem, and was immediately struck with terrible internal pain. He nevertheless hurried to accomplish his plan, but he fell from his chariot, was severely injured, and began rotting alive. Worms devoured him, and then the king understood that this was God's retribution. He wrote an order countermanding all his instructions, but it was too late, and the ungodly man perished in terrible torment.

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At that time a rebellion began in Judea, headed by Judah, surnamed Maccabeus ("the Hammer"). With the Lord's help the pagans were routed, and in December of 164 B.C. the faithful again returned to Jerusalem. They cleansed the temple of idols, built a new altar, and lit the lamp. This occurred on the 25th of Kislev, the very day when the pagans defiled the sanctuary. The temple's second consecration was accompanied by a miracle: there was only a single pitcher of holy oil, yet it burned throughout all eight days of the feast. Ever since then the Hebrews have celebrated the day of the temple's cleansing from idols, and on the same day our Lord Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem to preach (Jn. 10:22). The miracle itself prefigured the restoration of human nature, defiled by sins, which is called to become a temple of the Holy Spirit.

## THE STATE OF THE WORLD BEFORE THE LORD'S COMING

**T**he fullness of time foreordained by God for a turning point in the history of mankind was approaching. Men were using every means and opportunity to break free of the power of death and the curse, and were suffering crushing failures. Neither science, nor culture, nor philosophy were able to give man eternal happiness and extract him from the shadow of death. The ancient world was overwhelmed by the philosophy of epicurianism and hedonism.

“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” people said. Refined civilization gave man’s life no meaning, and though the entire world was basking in tranquility under the rule of the Roman Empire, a growing number of people were becoming overwhelmed by an inescapable despair.

At the same time people were anticipating the approach of some great change. The Sibylline Books said that the Creator would come to change the world and the great Day of Judgment would dawn, when the world would be consumed in a global fire. Virgil heralded the birth of a mysterious Infant, Whose birth would mark the beginning of a golden age, and Plato wrote of an ideal Righteous One Who would be slain upon a tree. The pagans sensed the approach of the great unknown God, Whose intervention would change the world.

This sense was particularly inflamed by the influence of the Hebrew writings, which had become accessible thanks to the translation of the Holy Scriptures into Greek. This was done in Alexandria at the command of Pharaoh Ptolemy Philadelphus in 285 B.C. by seventy translators (interpreters). According to tradition, they worked on this translation over the course of seventy days independently of one another, yet their translations coincided, being inspired by the Holy Spirit. This translation comprises the primary liturgical text of the Orthodox Church.

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The Hebrews scattered throughout the world, and under the influence of their preaching many pagans who had lost faith in the pagan gods began to accept the faith in God the Creator. These were called “God-fearers,” and along with the Hebrews they later became the first Christians.

In Israel itself there came a time when the prophets fell silent. The last prophet, Malachi, had disappeared 400 years before Christ, and the Hebrews were obliged to pay greater heed to Scripture, to the voice of the experts in the Law—the scribes, who interpreted its text in every detail. The Babylonian captivity had taught them to faithfully observe the Law, and among the Israelites the former idolatrous excesses were no longer encountered. Synagogues—places for assembling in prayer, where Scripture was studied—began to grow in significance. Thus the priests were gradually replaced by scribes, or rabbis.

The Church of Israel itself was split internally, with religious movements such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Zealots, and others exercising the greatest influence over the populace.

The Pharisees (meaning “set apart”), who considered themselves the only ones who were right and pure, believed in the resurrection of the dead, immortality of the soul, and the existence of the Holy Spirit and angels. They boasted of their exact observance of the letter of the Law, though their hearts were far from God. But instead of fulfilling the Scriptures they substituted their own interpretations (the traditions of the elders), distorting the essence

of Revelation. The Pharisees emphasized the necessity of separating from the pagans, and under their influence the Jews began to consider themselves exceptional people to whom all nations must be subjected. In their imagination the future Messiah began to be perceived not as a Savior from sin and death, but as a great Conqueror of the world. This attitude became particularly heightened after Palestine was conquered by Rome (in 63 B.C.). From among the Pharisees there emerged terrorist organizations—the Zealots, who killed both Romans and those who gave them aid.

The Pharisees were opposed by the Sadducees—rationalists who did not believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, or the existence of the spiritual world. Furthermore, they advocated assimilating the advances of pagan civilization as much as possible. The majority of the priests belonged to the Sadducees.

There was also a political sect, the Herodians, who believed King Herod to be the Messiah. These were proponents of loyalty to the occupying Roman government.

Thus, all mankind was waiting expectantly for changes that could only come from heaven.

## Part VII

# THE NEW TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



### THE PRE-ETERNAL COUNCIL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

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Since before the dawn of time God had known that humankind whom He had created would rebel against the Creator. Hence, the Eternal Council of the Holy Trinity decided to save mankind at a terrible price. God Himself overcomes the barriers that stood between Him and men—the difference in natures, sin, and death.

For none save God could have overcome the wall that stood between men and the Source of Life, the Creator. How can man cast off the snare of death on his own? How can one who is impure escape the lawful punishment for his sins? How can a creation tear open the heavens and break the bonds of space and time to encounter God? And yet, left to cope by his own abilities, which have been poisoned by evil, man inevitably perishes. His body inclines toward death, but even after death he finds no relief. For the decayed will, no longer restrained by outward obstacles, can simply tear the soul apart. The mind, infected by fantasies, yearns for what no longer exists, fleeing ever further from the Source of Life.

### THE CONCEPTION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

Nearly five and a half millennia had passed since the day when the first people fell into sin, and death burst in upon the world. The time of salvation was approaching. And God chose a family of elderly descendants of David

to fulfill His oath, given to that king and prophet of old. These chosen ones were the righteous spouses Joachim and Anna. For fifty years they had been barren, which at the time was considered a sign of God's wrath. The spouses prayed much to the Creator, offering sacrifices, but the years went by and children were not forthcoming.

Once Joachim brought a sacrifice to the temple, but the high priest rejected it, saying that he was unworthy to offer gifts, as he had left Israel no posterity. Then the grieved righteous man went into the Judean wilderness, and there in a tent he mourned over his grief for forty days. Upon learning of the words the high priest had spoken to her husband, Anna likewise fell into sorrow. She dressed in mourning and with lamentation prayed God to take away her shame.

And God heard their prayers. An angel appeared to them both and foretold that they would have a daughter through whom happiness would be bestowed upon all the world. Joachim ran to Jerusalem, and there at the Golden Gate he met his wife. Overjoyed, they related to each other the angel's message. The miracle came to pass, and in advanced age she was conceived who set aright the curse of our foremother Eve.

The feast of the Conception of the Most Holy Theotokos is celebrated on **December 22**.

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## THE NATIVITY OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

Nine months later, on September 8, in Jerusalem Anna gave birth to a daughter, to whom her father gave the name Mary (in the Hebrew, Lady), as the angel had foretold before her conception.

When Anna had given birth she asked, "Whom did I have?"

"A daughter," she was told.

Anna exclaimed, "My soul is made glad this day!"

Overjoyed, Joachim offered great sacrifices, which this time the high priest did not reject, having learned of the great miracle that had been worked in them. And all the Israelites gave thanks to God with joy. The angels in heaven likewise rejoiced, foreseeing the coming deliverance.

The pious spouses had made a promise to consecrate their daughter to God. For three years the mother fed her at the breast, and then she fulfilled her vow.

The miraculous circumstances of the birth of the Ever-virgin are not a coincidence. In her were joined the righteousness of the ancient saints of the

Old Testament. Her very birth was the fruit of prayer, so that from the very moment of her conception she would be purified by the righteousness of her parents.

The Nativity of the Theotokos, one of the chief nineteen feasts of the Orthodox Church, is celebrated on **September 21**.

## THE ENTRY OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

After three years had passed since the birth of the Virgin Mary, her parents resolved to fulfill their vow, which they had made to God even before she was conceived. Joachim assembled his numerous relatives, as well as blameless virgins, who accompanied Mary to the temple with lighted candles.

She was dressed in beautiful clothing, but more beautiful still was her soul, nurtured by the prayers of her parents. She was humble and meek, obedient and kind. And from childhood on she loved nothing more than prayer.

The high priest Zechariah went out to meet her, hailing the arrival of the future Theotokos (“Birthgiver of God”) with sacred hymns. Before the entrance to the temple in Jerusalem there was a flight of fifteen steps, upon which stood choirs of Levites, singing the psalms of ascent (Ps. 119–133). The three year-old Mary herself ascended the high steps, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

This same Spirit commanded Zechariah to do something completely unprecedented. The high priest led Mary into the most inaccessible part of the temple—the Holy of Holies—into which he himself was allowed to enter only once a year. There the Virgin was initiated into the supercelestial mysteries, and began preparing to receive God.

Thus the ancient prophecy of King David was fulfilled: *With gold-fringed garments is she arrayed, adorned in varied colours. The virgins that follow after her shall be brought unto the King, those near her shall be brought unto Thee. They shall be brought with gladness and rejoicing, they shall be brought into the temple of the King* (Ps. 44:15–16).

Mary remained living at the temple. There she was taught the Word of God and the art of weaving. Her heart was purified by prayer, and Orthodox Tradition relates that it was in the temple that the Theotokos, led by the Holy Spirit, devised the practice of prayer of the heart, in which man achieves deep inner tranquility and receives Revelation from the Creator.



Mary's spiritual mentor was the archangel Gabriel, who frequently appeared to her and fed her with heavenly bread. And Mary, burning with love for the Lord, made to Him a vow of eternal virginity.

When she turned twelve the high priest said that she could no longer remain at the temple. By this time the parents of the Theotokos had died, and she would normally have married. Upon learning of Mary's vow, however, the high priest entrusted her to the elder Joseph, also a descendant of King David, that he might guard the virginity of the Most-pure One. Mary was betrothed to him, and began living with Joseph in the Galilean city of Nazareth.

The feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the temple is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church. It is celebrated on **December 4**.

## THE CONCEPTION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Lk. 1:5–24)

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When the time for the Nativity of Christ approached, God sent the prophet John to prepare a way for Him in the hearts of men. John's parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were righteous, but God had given them no children, and they were already old.

Zechariah was a priest. Once, when he was burning incense on the altar of incense in the temple in Jerusalem, upon entering the sanctuary he saw an angel standing to the right of the altar.

Zechariah was terrified, but the angel said, "Fear not, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife will bear you a son, and you will call his name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice in his birth. He will turn many Israelites to God and will walk before Him in the spirit and the power of Elijah, so as to prepare the Lord's people for Him."

Zechariah expressed doubt at the angel's words. The angel replied, "I am Gabriel, who stands before God. And behold, you will be silent until what I have foretold comes to pass. For all this shall come to pass in due time."

The people were surprised that Zechariah remained so long in the sanctuary, but when they saw him dumb they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple.

After this Elizabeth conceived and hid herself five months, saying, "Thus has the Lord dealt with me in these days, to take away my reproach before men."

The Church celebrates the feast of the Conception of John the Baptist on **October 6**.

## THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS (Lk. 1:26–38)

In the sixth month after the conception of John the Baptist God sent the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, who at the time was living in Nazareth. Entering the place where she was, the angel said, *Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women* (Lk. 1:28).

Mary was troubled upon hearing such a greeting, and wondered what it could mean.

Gabriel continued: “Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bear a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His Kingdom shall have no end.”

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have not known a man?”

Gabriel replied, “The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; hence that Holy Thing that shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God. Behold, your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age, for with God nothing shall be impossible.”

Then Mary replied, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word* (Lk. 1:38).

And the angel departed from her. At the very moment when man said to the Creator, “Let it be,” the Word become flesh, the Power of the Most High (Christ) overshadowed her, creating in His Person a human nature that was like ours in every respect except for sin. The Holy Spirit purified the Virgin, making her capable of receiving God into Herself. Thus what was incomprehensible to the minds of both men and angels was accomplished: the union of two natures in one Personality.

The feast of the Annunciation, one of the twelve great feasts, is celebrated on **April 7**.

## THE MEETING OF THE THEOTOKOS WITH ELIZABETH (Lk. 1:39–57)

When she entered the house of Zechariah, the Spirit of God came upon Elizabeth, and she cried out, *Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for*

*there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord (Lk. 1:42–45).*

*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath helped His servant Israel [Is. 53], in remembrance of his mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever (Lk. 1:46–55).*

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months, then returned to her own house.

The words of Elizabeth and the angel Gabriel are the basis for the chief hymn in honor of the Mother of God, “O Theotokos Virgin,”<sup>101</sup> and the Church sings the song of the Virgin Mary at every matins service.

## THE NATIVITY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Lk. 1:57–80)

**I**n the meantime the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. All her neighbors rejoiced for her. On the eighth day the infant was to be circumcised and given a name. Some wanted to name him Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth said, “No. Let his name be John” (meaning “the grace of Him Who Is”).

All were amazed, for they had no relatives by that name. Then they turned to his father. He asked for a writing tablet, and wrote upon it, “His name shall be John.” Immediately his dumbness ended, and he began to glorify God. All those who heard were amazed, and all the inhabitants of that land were seized with reverent fear, and asked each other, “What will become of this infant?”

But Zechariah, seized with the power of the Holy Spirit, prophesied and gave thanks to God, Who had visited His people and raised up His Servant, the Savior, thereby fulfilling the promise given to their fathers. Addressing his prophecy to the newborn, Zechariah foretold that he would be a prophet of the Most High, for he would go before His face to prepare a way for Him. He would enable the people to understand that God’s salvation lies in that their sins would be forgiven by God’s mercy, with which the Dayspring from

<sup>101</sup> Known in the West as “Hail Mary”—Ed.



on high would visit them, enlightening those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and would guide their feet in the path of peace.

The infant grew, waxing strong in spirit, and was in the wilderness until the day of his appearance to Israel. After Christ's Nativity, Herod learned of the Lord and resolved to kill not only Him, but Saint John as well. He ordered that Zechariah be killed in the temple for refusing to tell where his son was hidden. Elizabeth fled from her pursuing persecutors, and a mountain concealed her in a cave. There she soon reposed. The prophet John was raised by God in the wilderness.

The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist is celebrated as a great feast on July 7.

## THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST (Mt. 1:18–2:12, Lk. 2:1–20)

In the meantime Mary returned to Nazareth, and Joseph learned that she was pregnant. Being a righteous man, Joseph did not wish to disgrace her, and decided to divorce her secretly. When this thought occurred to him, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream.

“Joseph, son of David!” he said. “Fear not to take Mary, your wife, for that which has been born in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son, and you will give Him the name Jesus (“He Who Is, come to save”), for He shall save His people from sins. And this will occur so that the word of God might be fulfilled, which was spoken through the prophet: *Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel*” [“God with us,” Is. 7:14].

Arising from sleep, Joseph took Mary to him, but never had physical relations with her.

At that time the Roman emperor Augustus issued a decree that a world-wide census was to be taken, and all went to be registered, each to his own city. Joseph and Mary were descendants of King David, whose native city was Bethlehem, and so to this city they went. It was then the time for Mary to give birth, but there was no room for them in the inn. They found a cave that was used as a stable for animals. Thus, there in the cave Mary gave birth to her Son, and she herself wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, for being innocent she did not experience the pangs of labor which Eve had received for her offence.

She gave birth to the Divine Infant and laid Him in a manger—a feed trough for animals—thereby fulfilling the ancient prophecy that the ox and the ass know their Lord, but Israel did not recognize God: *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider* (Is. 1:3).

At that time shepherds were watching a flock of sacrificial animals out in the field. Suddenly, in the midst of the night sky the glory of the Lord shown forth, and the angel of God appeared before them, and said:

“Fear not! I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be for all people. For today in the city of David a Saviour has been born, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”

And suddenly a multitude of the angels appeared from the heavens, praising God and saying, *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!* (Lk. 2:14).

When the heavenly hosts departed from the shepherds, the latter went to Bethlehem and found Christ and His mother, and worshiping him they related what had been said concerning this Infant.





On the eighth day the Infant was circumcised and given the name Jesus that the angel had foretold.

While the holy family was still in Bethlehem, magi (astrologers) came to Jerusalem from the East, from Persia, and began asking where the King of the Jews had been born, as they had seen His star in the east and had come to worship him. King Herod was troubled, and summoning the scribes he learned from them that the Messiah was to appear in Bethlehem of Judea. Then Herod summoned the magi and commanded them to go to the city of David and find out where the Infant was, that the king too might worship Him.

When they left Jerusalem, the star they had seen in the east led them to the very house where the Divine Infant was. An angel appeared to them in the form of a star, sent by God that they might forsake their astrology and serve the Creator.

Upon coming to Christ the magi worshiped Him and offered Him gifts: gold, as to the King; incense, as to God; and myrrh (liquid fragrances) as to one Who was to die.

After this they received a revelation from an angel not to return to Herod, and they returned to their own country by another way. According to Tradition they were later baptized by the apostle Thomas. Thus the three magicians became witnesses to the Divine Incarnation.

The great feast of the Nativity of Christ is celebrated on **January 7**. It is preceded by a forty-day fast.

## THE MEETING OF THE LORD (Lk. 2:22–38)

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On the fortieth day after the Nativity, the Theotokos and Joseph brought the Infant Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to fulfill the command of the Mosaic Law (Lev. 12:2–6). According to the Law, every first-born son was to be consecrated to God, and a sacrifice was to be offered as a ransom for him. The rich would bring a lamb, while the poor would bring two pigeons or two young turtle doves. Joseph and Mary offered two pigeons and two young turtle doves—a symbol of the Old and New Testaments, which are united in Christ.

In Jerusalem at that time there lived a righteous and pious man named Simeon. He awaited the coming of Him Who was to comfort Israel, as the Holy Spirit had promised him. Tradition states that he was one of the seventy translators who created the Greek translation of the Bible (in 285 B.C.). When he was translating the book of the prophet Isaiah, upon seeing the words, *Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel* (Is. 7:14), he doubted that a Virgin could give birth. He decided to “fix” the prophet’s words and write “young woman” instead of “Virgin.” But no sooner had Simeon reached out his hand to do so than an angel stopped him, saying, “The Holy Spirit says that you will live until the time when you will see the fulfillment of the prophecy that you doubted.”

Now, as the holy family entered the temple, the Spirit led Simeon to meet them. Then Simeon took the Infant in his arms and blessed God: *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel* (Lk. 2:29–32).



Then, turning to Mary, Simeon blessed her and said concerning Christ: “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that will cause many to stumble. And a sword shall pierce your heart, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

This prophecy was fulfilled when Mary saw her Son crucified on the Cross. And to this day arguments concerning the Savior continue, as Simeon foretold. Those who believe in Him rise up to the heavens, while those who reject Him fall into the abyss of hades.

In addition to Simeon the Lord was also recognized by the pious widow Anna, who had lived at the temple for many decades and served God through fasting and prayer day and night. She approached them and glorified God, speaking of the coming salvation for all who awaited it in Israel.

The great feast of the Meeting of the Lord, one of the twelve, is celebrated on **February 15**.

## THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND CHRIST’S LIFE IN NAZARETH (Mt. 2:13–23, Lk. 2:39–52)

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**A**fter their miraculous meeting in Jerusalem, King Herod learned that the magi had deceived him. He flew into a terrible rage, and gave orders for all the infants in Bethlehem under two years of age to be killed, so as to kill the newborn Messiah with them. A terrible grief seized the city of King David, and the ancient prophecy was fulfilled: *A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not* (Jer. 31:15).

Thus the foremother of the Hebrew nation, buried near Bethlehem, wept for the holy infants, who, incidentally, did not perish eternally, for they became the first martyrs for Christ.

God sent his angel to Joseph the Betrothed, and the angel said to him, “Arise, take the Child and His mother, and flee into the land of Egypt.”

Joseph immediately obeyed the celestial messenger and fled, taking with him the Theotokos and Christ. Tradition states that Joseph, preferring not to rely on his own weak abilities, took with him his son James, who later became known as the brother of God. Tradition likewise relates that when the Divine Child entered Egypt the idols of that land collapsed, and the oracle of Ammon cried out in terror that He Who was to destroy paganism had come. In this citadel of idolatry the Lord dwelled for three and a half years.

During that time the child-killer Herod died in terrible torment: he rotted alive, and worms devoured him while he was still on earth. Then the angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream in Egypt, and said, "Go back, for they who sought the Child's life have died."

But when Joseph reached Judea he learned that Herod Archelaus now ruled there, and he feared that he would continue his father's work. Once again he received a revelation during sleep, in obedience to which he settled in the Galilean city of Nazareth.

In this settlement the Lord Jesus Christ lived until thirty years of age, obedient to the Theotokos and His supposed father Joseph, helping him in his carpentry. According to tradition, as related by Saint Justin the Philosopher (mid second century), Christ built ploughs and yokes.

As He grew in stature the treasures of Wisdom hidden within Him were gradually revealed, and the grace of God upon Him began to shine ever more brightly.

When the Lord turned twelve He and His parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. There, after the feast had ended, Jesus remained in the Temple, while Joseph and Mary started back toward Nazareth. Upon learning that the Youth was not with their other relatives they returned to Jerusalem. After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening and inquiring of them in such a way that they marveled at His wisdom.

"My child, what have You done to us?" Mary asked. "We have been seeking you in great sorrow."

To this He replied, "Why did you need to seek Me? Or did you not know that I ought to be in the things of My Father?"

But they did not understand His words, though the Mother of God kept all these words in her heart.

## THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Mt. 3:1–8, Mk. 1:1–8, Lk. 3:1–17, Jn. 1:6–8, 19–28)

When the time appointed before the beginning of creation arrived for Christ to appear to men, God sent His greatest prophet, John, to preach repentance. He commanded John to baptize people with the baptism of repentance, so as to prepare the way for Him who would come after him, and said, "He upon Whom you see the Spirit descending and abiding is He Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit."

Then John left the wilderness where he had been living and went about all the region of the river Jordan, preaching repentance. He was clothed in a



garment of camel's hair and girded with a leather belt, and he fed on locusts and wild honey.

He taught all those who came to him (which included the inhabitants of the capital, Judea, Galilee, and the region beyond Jordan):

“Repent [convert your mind—*Auth.*], for the Kingdom of God is at hand. I am the voice crying in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths [i.e., your way of life—*Auth.*] for Him.”

John baptized (or immersed) in the Jordan all those who heard him, and required that they confess their sins. Tradition relates that the one being bap-

tized would enter the water up to his neck and name all his transgressions, and when he had repented of them the prophet would immerse him completely in the water.

“What are we to do?” the people asked him.

John the Baptist replied, *He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise* (Lk. 3:11).

Those who collected the tribute he commanded not to demand more than what was due. To the soldiers he said, *Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages* (Lk. 3:14).

When the Pharisees (the experts in the Law) and the Sadducees (the rationalist sectarians) came to him hypocritically, the Baptist rebuked them terribly:

“You spawn of vipers! Who has taught you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring fruits worthy of repentance, and do not even think of saying that God will spare you for the sake of your father Abraham. For God is able from stones [i.e., the Gentiles—*Auth.*] to raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already put to the root of the tree, and every tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire. I baptize you with the water of repentance, but there comes after me One mightier than I, Whose sandal straps I am unworthy to bend down and undo and to carry them after Him. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will cleanse His threshing floor [i.e., His people—*Auth.*], and gather the wheat [the righteous—*Auth.*] into His granary, but the straw He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

(Mt. 3:13–17, Mk. 1:9–11, Lk. 3:21–22)

When all were being baptized by John, the Lord also came with them. John restrained Him, saying, “It is I who ought to be baptized by You, yet you come to Me?”

“Let it be so now,” Jesus replied, “For thus we ought to fulfill all righteousness.”

Then John baptized Him. When Christ was immersed in the water, a fire flared up over it, for the ancient enemy, the devil, whom Scripture calls a serpent that makes its lair in the waters (Ps. 73:13), was expelled from the very roots of existence. The waters of Jordan, which had formerly been permeated with sin, were sanctified by the power of the Lord, and in the sacrament of this Baptism it received the power to bear children unto God. And the angels



surrounded the river, waiting to receive under their protection those who would be born in its waters.

Having been immersed in the water, Christ prayed to the Father, and behold, heaven was opened, which had been closed by the misdeed of Adam, and now those who are baptized are able to ascend to the Throne of God.



The Lord did not tarry in the river, as He had no sin and hence had no need of confession, and after being immersed He immediately came out of the water.

And forthwith God the Father proclaimed from the heavens, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* (Mt. 3:17).

And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.

The Spirit took the form of a dove so as to indicate the end of the great flood of sin which had inundated the world. It was not, however, at the moment of His Baptism that Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit (as some heretics believe), for His conception in the womb of His Mother was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Rather, this descent from above was so that through Jesus the Spirit might be bestowed upon believers. Hence, immediately after baptism, in which through Christ we are adopted to sonship to the Father, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through chrismation.

John the Forerunner bore witness to Him to all those assembled, saying, *This was He of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for He was before me. And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him* (Jn. 1:15–18).

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On this day, at the river Jordan, for the first time God clearly showed to men that He is three Personalities, and for this reason this day is also called Theophany—the showing-forth of God. Formerly people were far from the Creator, and knew that He was one, but now, having become children of God through baptism, in the great flame we see three Suns, each shining in the other. And having seen this we are able to commune of the eternal life of the three Persons, Who abide in unoriginate love. This is why true baptism is only possible for those who believe rightly in the Trinity and are baptized in His true name.

The great feast of the Theophany of the Lord, one of the twelve, is celebrated on **January 19**.

## THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS

**I**mmediately after His baptism the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt Him. The Lord, being not only True God but also true man, the Last Adam, had to vanquish the ancient foe where our forefather had succumbed.

Christ fasted forty days and nights, eating and drinking nothing. At last He grew hungry. We see the benefit fasting gives against the enemy, and in imitation of Christ we fast for forty days before Pascha.

Then the tempter approached Him and said, “If you are the Son of God, say for these stones to become bread.”

In other words, he was proposing that Christ not only sate His hunger, but also become the master of all food for the whole earth—to become the “bread czar” so that people would follow him as their common Provider. Here Satan presented Christ with the first temptation of Eve, who saw *that the tree was good for food* (Gen. 3:6). He attempted to beguile Christ with the lust of the flesh (1 Jn. 2:16).

But Christ replied, *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God* (Mt. 4:4, cf. Deut. 8:3).

One must seek life not in the material world, but with the Creator, for He intended man to live by His Word. And indeed, many ascetics have lived almost entirely without food.

Then the devil took Him and set him upon a pinnacle of the temple overhanging a deep gulf, and said, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down, for it is written, *He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. On their hands shall they bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone* (Ps. 90:11–12).

Thus the enemy acted as the original sectarian, turning the words of the Bible against God and His servants. He proposed that Christ force men to serve him through signs, so that they might seek not God, but a miracle. This is the second temptation of Eve, for: the tree was *pleasant to the eyes* (Gen. 3:6): the lust of the eyes (1 Jn. 2:16).

But here also Christ remained faithful to the Father: *It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (Mt. 4:7, cf. Deut. 6:16).

One must not needlessly demand a miracle, nor must one put oneself in danger, hoping that God will help. Nor must one set the miracle higher than the Creator.

Then the devil takes Christ and sets Him upon a high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the world in single moment, and says, “All this will I give to You if you will fall down and worship me.”

This is the third temptation: the pride of life (1 Jn. 2:16), the lust of power and knowledge, by which Eve was beguiled. The enemy proposes that Jesus become the Ruler of the world, whom all would follow in spite of themselves. But this too does not please the Lord, Who does not wish to become a godless tyrant.

Then Jesus says, *Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Mt. 4:10; cf. Deut. 6:13).

Thus the Lord overcame the devil, rejecting all his proposals and showing that sin is contrary to human nature. He rejected Satan’s false claims to authority over the world, and said that one must worship the Creator alone, and that without Him neither knowledge, nor power, nor might are of any worth.



Then the devil departed from Christ until the time, and up until His sufferings acted upon Him through men. In the wilderness he had intended to cause Christ to break the commandment of love for God, and by acting through men (the Pharisees, the scribes, and Judas) he attempted to dissuade Him from love for men.

Then the angels came to Jesus and ministered to Him as the Victor, and the beasts came to Him, recognizing in Him the New Adam.



## THE CALLING OF THE FIRST APOSTLES

(Jn. 1:15–51)

John the Baptist was approached by a delegation from the Sanhedren (the religious authority in Israel), who asked him who he was. John declared that he was not the Christ.

“Are you Elijah?” they asked him.

He said, “No.”

“A prophet, then (Deut. 18)?”

“No.”

“Who are you, then?” they asked. “And why do you baptize if you are neither Christ, nor Elijah, nor a prophet?”

He replied, “I am the voice crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,’ as said the prophet Isaiah (Is. 40:3). I baptize you with water, but there stands in your midst One Whom you do not know. It is He that Baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

The next day John was standing on the shore with his disciples, and pointing to Jesus as He was coming toward them he said, *Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, After me cometh a Man which is preferred before me: for He was before me. And I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water ... I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God* (Jn. 1:29–34).

After this his disciples went and followed Jesus. The first of these was Andrew. Andrew went and found his brother Simon.

“We have found the Messiah,” he told to him, and brought him to Jesus.

Seeing him, the Lord said, “You, Simon, son of Jonah, shall be called Peter [‘the Rock’].”

On another day Jesus went to Galilee and, finding Philip, said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip found Nathaniel (Bartholomew) and said, “We have found Him of Whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote: Jesus of Nazareth.”

Nathaniel, who knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, answered, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Philip answered, “Come and see.”

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming and said, “This is a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile.”

“How do you know me?” Nathaniel asked.

“Before Philip called you while you were sitting beneath the fig tree I saw you.”

“You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Nathaniel exclaimed, astounded by Jesus’ gift of prophecy.

The Lord replied “You believe because I told you where you were. Amen, amen, I tell you, you will see greater things than this. Henceforth you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending to the Son of Man.”

Thus was fulfilled the ancient vision of Jacob, who in a dream beheld a ladder from earth to heaven. And indeed, in the Nativity, the Resurrection, and the Ascension the angels ministered to Christ.

## THE MIRACLE IN CANA OF GALILEE (Jn. 2:1–12)

Three days later a wedding was held in Cana of Galilee, and Christ was invited along with His disciples. It so happened that the hosts' wine ran out. Then the Theotokos appealed to Jesus to help them. To this the Lord replied, *O Woman, what is that to Me and to you? My hour has not yet come* (Jn. 2:4).

Then the Mother of God said to the servants, "Whatever He tells you, do it."

Jesus commanded that six water jars, which were used for ritual ablutions, be filled to the brim with water. This they did. Then the Lord commanded them to draw water and take it to the steward of the feast. The steward tasted the water that had become wine, then called the groom:

"Everyone first serves the good wine, and then that which is worse, but you have kept the best wine until now!"



Thus Jesus worked His first miracle and revealed His glory. For He revealed that it was He Who created the grape vine, on the third day of creation, and Who blessed marriage in paradise. Since that time the Church has numbered marriage among the seven sacraments.

The groom, whose name was Simon, became one of the twelve apostles of Christ.

## THE FIRST PASSOVER. THE DRIVING OUT OF THE MERCHANTS IN THE TEMPLE AND THE CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS

(Jn. 2:13 — 3:35)

**T**he feast of Passover was approaching. Jesus Christ came to the temple and found it filled with people doing a brisk business, selling oxen and sheep and exchanging money. Jesus Christ scattered the money of the money changers, overturned their tables, drove out the merchants, and commanded that the doves be taken away.

“Take this out of here,” said the Lord, “and do not make My Father’s house a house of trade.” Thus was fulfilled the ancient prophecy, *The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up* (Ps. 68:10).

The Jews were indignant at such “vigilante” behavior, and demanded a sign that would prove Christ’s authority to take such action. But He replied, “Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days,” meaning His own Body. The Jews however thought that Jesus was speaking of the temple building.

There was a certain Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. *The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit* (Jn. 3:2–6). (In the sacrament of baptism a person becomes spiritual and capable of beholding God.) *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth* (Jn. 3:8). *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the*

*world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (Jn. 3:13–20).*

Soon after this the disciples asked the prophet John the Baptist concerning Christ.

John replied, “You know that I am not the Christ, but am sent before Him. He is the Bridegroom, and I am the friend of the Bridegroom. I hear His voice and rejoice in Him, and this joy has reached its fullness. He must increase, but I must decrease. He is above all, for He comes from the Heavens and speaks what He knows. He who receives Him bears witness that the Christ is True God. *For He Whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him (Jn. 3:34).* The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands. Whoever believes in the Son has Life Eternal, but whoever does not submit to Him will not see life, but rather the wrath of God abides upon Him.”

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## CHRIST AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (Jn. 4)

The Pharisees were filled with envy toward Christ, and He departed from Judea into Galilee. Along the way the Lord came to the Samaritan city of Sychar. Near the city there was a well, which had been dug by the patriarch Jacob. There at noon Christ became weary and sat down, sending His disciples to buy food. Here a Samaritan woman named Photini<sup>102</sup> came out of the city to draw water. The Lord asked her for a drink, and Photini was amazed that He felt no repugnance for a Samaritan woman, for the Jews had nothing to do with that religious community because the Samaritans rejected all the prophets after Moses.

To her question the Lord replied, “If you knew the gift of God and Who it is that is speaking with you, you would ask Him and He would give you the water of life.”

“Lord, You have no pitcher, and the well is deep. Are you really greater than Jacob, who dug this well?” the woman asked in surprise, thinking He was speaking of the spring.

<sup>102</sup> Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox calendar, by St. Demetrius of Rostov, for April 2 (old style)





“Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again, and this water will become for him a spring flowing into Life Eternal,” replied Christ, speaking of the living water of the Holy Spirit.

The Samaritan woman asked for this water, and Christ instructed her to bring her husband.

“I have no husband,” she replied.

“This you have rightly said,” the Lord replied. “You have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband.”

“I see that You are a prophet,” the embarrassed woman replied. “Our fathers worshiped upon this mountain [Mount Gerizim—*Auth.*], but you Jews say that one must worship God in Jerusalem.”

“Believe Me, neither upon this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know, but we worship what we know, for salvation is of the Jews. The hour is coming, and has already come, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, for the Father seeks such worshipers for Himself. God is a Spirit; hence, He should be worshiped in Spirit and in Truth.”

True worship must be spiritual and true. It is not dependent on location or upon the images of the Old Testament. In order to properly worship the Father one must strive for the holiness bestowed by the Holy Spirit, and to learn the true Revelation of God, bestowed upon us in the Truth—Jesus Christ.

The woman replied, “I know that the Messiah [the Anointed One, or Christ—*Auth.*] will come and will tell us everything.”

“I Who am speaking with you am He,” the Lord replied.

When the Samaritan woman heard these words, in amazement she ran to tell what she had heard in the city.

In the meantime the disciples came and asked Him to partake of the food. But Christ replied, “My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me. The harvest is ripe. The reaper receives his pay and gathers fruit unto Life eternal, that the reaper and the sower might rejoice together. I sent you to reap that at which you did not labor. Others labored [the prophets—*Auth.*], and you have entered into their labors.”

At that moment the Samaritans arrived, having heard the story of the woman Photini about how the Lord had told her everything. They listened to Christ, and persuaded Him to remain with them for two more days. A great many people believed in Him, and said to the woman, “Now we believe not from your words, for we have heard for ourselves and know that He is truly the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

Later all those who had believed were baptized by the apostles, and Photini herself, having changed her entire way of life, became a preacher of the Gospel and died a martyric death in Rome together with her children in the year 66.

The Church celebrates her memory on April 2, and commemorates this sacred event on the fifth Sunday after Pascha.

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## THE PREACHING IN GALILEE THE CALLING OF THE APOSTLES

(Mt. 4:12–25, 9:9–13; Mk. 1:16–20, 2:13–17; Lk. 5:1–11, 27–32)

After John the Forerunner had been arrested by Herod, Christ came to Galilee, and there He preached the Gospel, saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand.”

When He was by the sea of Galilee He saw two brothers, Simon and Andrew, casting their nets into the sea. The Lord went to them and asked them to pull out a little ways from the shore so that He could preach the Word of God to the people. And in this way He taught them.

Then He said to Simon, “Sail out into the deep and cast your nets to make a catch.”

Simon replied that during the day the fish leave the deep. “Teacher, we have labored all night long and caught nothing, but at Your word we will cast the net.”

And immediately the nets were filled with a multitude of fishes, so that they even began to break. He summoned his companions, and they sailed over and filled the two boats so full that they began to sink.





Seeing this, Simon cried in terror, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.”

But Christ said to him and Andrew, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

They immediately left their nets and followed Him.

Going on He saw two brothers, Zebedee’s sons James and John, who were in a boat mending their nets. He called them, and they left their nets and their father and followed Christ.

Later the Lord saw a tax collector (a publican), Levi (Matthew), and said to him, “Follow Me.”

He immediately left everything and followed Jesus Christ. At his home Levi prepared a sumptuous meal, and among his guests were many publicans and others sinners.

The Pharisees protested, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with sinners?”

But Christ replied, “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Thus the love of God overcame both love for parents and love of money in the future apostles.

Once the Lord prayed all night to His Father, then chose twelve of His disciples, whom He called apostles (“messengers”), and sent them out to preach. The first of these was *Simon*, to whom Christ gave the name *Peter* (the Rock), and *Andrew*, his brother, *James the son of Zebedee* and *John*, who were surnamed Boanerges (“sons of thunder”), *Philip* and *Bartholomew (Nathaniel)*, *Thomas* and *Levi (Matthew)*, *James the son of Alphaeus* and *Judas Lebbaeus*, surnamed *Thaddeus* (“the Praiser”), *Simon of Canaan* (surnamed “the Zealot”) and *Judas Iscariot*, who betrayed the Lord.

To them the Lord gave the power to drive out unclean spirits, to heal the sick, and to raise the dead. They mark the beginning of the chain of succession in the Orthodox Church.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

(Mt. 5:1 — 7:29, Lk. 6:20–49)

Seeing the people, like Moses the Lord ascended a mountain (showing that one must labor in order to fulfill the will of God) and taught the people. As the greatest Prophet He gave the Commandments through the fulfillment of which beatitude, or bliss, is achieved:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Mt. 5:3–12).*

The Lord also said that He came not to break the Law, but to bring it to completion. Hence, whoever breaks even the smallest of the Commandments and teaches others to do so will prove the least in the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Christ also forbade not only murder, but even needless anger (for anger is not needless when it is directed toward what separates us from God). He said, "Whoever says to his brother 'You empty person' shall be subject to the supreme court, but whoever says 'You fool' shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna."

He likewise forbade lustful glances, as well as divorces, except in cases of adultery. He taught that one must not swear by anything, for man owns nothing. But our every word must be either "yes" or "no." What is more than this is of the evil one.

Christ did not allow Himself to be avenged, and commanded that we love our enemies, to bless those that curse us, and to pray for those that offend us, that we may become sons of the Heavenly Father, Who is good to both the ungrateful and the evil.

The Lord taught that one must do works of charity in secret, in such a way that one's left hand does not know what one's right hand is doing. And our Heavenly Father Who sees in secret will reward us openly.

Like charitable works, prayer and fasting must also be concealed from men, that we may receive a reward from God the Father.

During prayer one must not put on a show, but must pray in the closet of one's heart. Furthermore, when praying one must not be verbose, for our Father knows our needs before we even ask Him. However, the condition on which our prayer will be heard must be the sincere forgiveness of others' transgressions. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you (Mt. 7:7),* Christ said.

Christ said that we should not gather treasures on earth, but rather in heaven, where they cannot be stolen. For where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. One cannot simultaneously serve both God and riches. Hence,





we must not become wrapped up in various concerns, but must rely on God in all things: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil* [i.e., the cares] *thereof* (Mt. 6:33–34).

We must not condemn our neighbor, because with whatever judgment we judge, by the same will we be judged.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye* (Mt. 7:3–5).

*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it* (Mt. 7:12–14).

The Lord likewise commanded us to beware of false prophets, who are like wolves in sheep's clothing: *Ye shall know them by their fruits ... every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit ... Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven* (Mt. 7:16–17, 21).

On Judgment Day many will point out that they worked miracles in Christ's name, but He will say, *I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it* (Mt. 7:23–27).

When the Lord finished these words all were amazed, because He taught with power.

## THE SECOND PASSOVER. THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC (Jn. 5:1–47)

**T**he Lord came to Jerusalem for the feast. In Jerusalem there is a pool called Bethesda, located by the Sheep Gate. There were five galleries there, in which many sick people lay, awaiting the movement of the water, since at times an angel descended into the water and troubled it. The first to dip into the pool after it was troubled would be cured of any illness. There lay there a paralytic who had been ill for 38 years.

“Do you wish to be well?” Christ asked him.

“Lord, I have no man to throw me into the pool when the water is troubled. While I am coming another man goes there first,” the sick man replied.

“Arise, take up your bed, and walk,” the Lord Jesus commanded him.

And immediately the paralytic, who had had no chance for healing, was filled with life-giving power. He arose, took up his bed, and walked. It was a Saturday, and the Pharisees forbade him to carry his bed, citing the Law (though the carrying itself was not work, but rather a testimony to the miraculous power of God, Who gave the Sabbath so that men might rest from sufferings).

Later in the temple Christ met the man who had been healed, and said these words, showing that his illness had been rooted in sin:

“And so you have been healed. See to it that you sin no more, that you may not suffer something worse.”

The healed man told the Jews that it was Christ Who had healed him. In a rage they wished to kill the Lord, but He replied, *My Father worketh hitherto* [ruling the world regardless of the day of the week], *and I work* (Jn. 5:17).

Then the Jews wanted to kill Christ for making Himself equal to God. But He replied that He had received all power from the Father:

“The Father loves the Son, and shows all things to Him. Both the Father and the Son resurrect the dead. And all Judgment is given to the Son by the Father, that He might be honored as the Father is honored.”

God Himself bears witness to the righteousness of Christ’s Judgment. And this witness is manifested by the works given to the Son by the Father. Scripture also speaks of Him, for if the Jews had believed Moses they would have believed Christ also, because Moses spoke of Him (Deut. 18:15). And Moses will accuse the Hebrews before the Father for their unbelief in Christ.

After this the Lord departed into Galilee.

The Church remembers this remarkable miracle on the fourth Sunday after Pascha.

## THE HEALING OF THE SERVANT OF THE CENTURION (Mt. 8:1–13, Lk. 7:1–10)

When the Lord returned to Galilee, He was approached by a leper who said, “Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean!”

“I do wish it. Be cleansed!” the Lord replied, and touched him.

Immediately the incurable disease left the man, so that his whole body was renewed. The mighty power of the Creator had restored His creation.



To show the authenticity of the healing Christ sent the healed man to the temple in Jerusalem, to offer the sacrifice appointed by God for his healing.

When He entered Capernaum He was approached by a centurion (a commander of 100 soldiers).

“Lord,” he implored Him, “my servant is lying at home paralyzed, and is suffering severely, to the point that he may die.”

“I will come and heal him,” the Lord replied.

“No, Lord,” the centurion replied. “I am unworthy that You should come beneath my roof. Rather, merely say the word, and my servant will become well. For though I am a man under authority, my soldiers carry out my commands, and in the same way Your word will be fulfilled unquestioningly.”

Hearing these words Christ was amazed, and said, *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the children of the kingdom [the Jews] shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt. 8:10–12).

And the Lord said to the centurion, “Go; as you have believed, so let it be unto you.”

And his servant was immediately healed.

So we also must remember that God is able to fulfill our every request, if only we ask Him with faith.



## THE RESURRECTION OF THE WIDOW'S SON (Lk. 7:11–17)

The Lord came to the city of Nain. At that moment a dead man was being carried out—the only son of a widow. A huge crowd was walking out of the city with the widow. Seeing her the Lord took pity on her, and touched the bier. Those who were carrying it stopped,

“Young man, I say to you, arise!” He said.

The dead man immediately arose alive, and Christ gave him to his mother. Thus for the first time He showed His power over life and death.

## THE CALMING OF THE STORM

(Mt. 8:23–27, Mk. 4:36–41, Lk. 8:22–25)

After this miracle the Lord came to the house of Simon Peter. There his mother-in-law was lying, sick with fever (blood poisoning), which is usually deadly. Christ touched her hand, and she immediately became well and



served them. When evening fell, a multitude of sick and possessed people came running to Peter's house. The Lord drove out the spirits by His word and healed all the sick.

Then He commanded His disciples to sail to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The Lord entered the ship and went to sleep. In the meantime a storm began, and the ship was awash with waves.

Then the disciples woke Christ, crying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!"

He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea. Immediately all became quiet.

To His disciples He said, "Why do you have so little faith?"

The disciples were amazed and asked, "Who is this that the winds and the sea obey Him?"

So also Christians in times of severe trials cry out to Christ, and He immediately saves us from every abyss.

## THE GADARENE DEMONIACS

(Mt. 8:28–34, Mk. 5:1–20, Lk. 8:26–39)

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When Christ arrived on the opposite shore of the sea, in the country of the Gadarenes, He was met by two men possessed by demons. They were extraordinarily strong, so much so that they tore even the iron chains with which they were shackled. All were afraid to travel that road.

The demoniacs cried out, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come to torment us before the time?"

"What is your name?" Christ asked.

"Legion, because there are many of us," replied the evil spirits.

On a neighboring mountain a large herd of pigs were grazing (about two thousand head). The demons implored the Lord not to send them into the abyss, but to allow them to enter the pigs. This He allowed, to give confidence to those who were healed. The demons entered the herd, and immediately the whole herd rushed down a steep cliff into the sea.

The swineherds ran to warn the inhabitants of the city. They came and saw the men that were healed. Then they asked Christ to leave their country. The demoniacs themselves wanted to remain with the Lord, but He sent them to declare in the unbelieving cities how God had shown them mercy.

Thus, God is able to free us from the power of the devil, who has no power over Christians. We need only not be like the inhabitants of the country of the Gadarenes, who valued their possessions above God.

## THE HEALING OF THE WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD, AND THE RESURRECTION OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (Mt. 9:18–26, Mk. 5:21–43, Lk. 8:40–56)

When the Lord returned to Capernaum the people received Him. A ruler of the synagogue, Jairus, approached Him and asked Him to come to his house, because his daughter was dying. As He was going there the people thronged Him. One woman, who had been suffering from an issue of blood for twenty years, and who had spent all she possessed on physicians, only to have her condition continue to deteriorate, touched the fringe of His clothing. She thought that merely touching His clothing would be enough to be healed. And indeed, she immediately sensed that she had been healed. But the Lord did not leave her without instruction.

“Who touched Me?” He exclaimed.

Peter said, “The people throng you, and you ask, ‘Who touched Me?’”

*Somebody hath touched Me*, Christ replied, *for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me* (Lk. 8:46).

The woman, seeing that she was not concealed, solemnly declared the miracle that had happened to her.

The Lord said to her, *Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace* (Lk. 8:48).

At that moment some people came to Jairus and said, *Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master*.

But the Lord encouraged him, saying, *Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole* (Lk. 8: 50).

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When they came into the house they found a crowd of musicians and professional mourners wailing over the corpse.

“Why are you weeping?” the Lord asked. “The maiden is not dead, but asleep.”

They all laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead. He sent them all out, retaining only three disciples—Peter, James, and John—and the parents of the girl. *And He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise* (Mk. 5:41).

And she immediately arose and walked. The girl was about twelve years old. All were amazed, but Christ ordered that the child be fed, that all might be convinced of her resurrection.

## THE PARABLE OF THE SOWING OF THE DIVINE SEED AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

(Mt. 13:1–23, Mk. 4:1–32, Lk. 8:4–15)

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Once, when Christ was sitting by the sea in a boat and teaching the people, He told several parables in which He unfolded the mysteries of the Kingdom of God:

“A sower went out to sow. Some of the seed fell along the road, and the birds came and ate the grain. Other seed fell on stony ground and quickly sprouted up, because there was not much soil there. But when the sun rose that seed quickly dried up, because the soil was shallow. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and smothered it. Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, some thirty-fold, others sixty-fold, and others a hundredfold. He that has ears to hear, let him hear!”

Privately the disciples asked Him the meaning of this parable, and Christ explained it to them:

“You are given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to the rest everything is given in parables, because *they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand*” (Mt. 13:13).

Thus, the Sower is Christ, and the seed is the Word of God. Whoever hears this word of the Kingdom but does not wish to understand it is like the seed that fell along the road, when the devil comes and steals the seeds. That which was sown on stony ground is he who hears the word and receives it with joy, but does not wish to struggle with sin and temptations, wanting everything to happen on its own. In times of persecutions and difficulties they become “disillusioned” with the faith and fall away from God. The seed that fell among thorns is an image of those who receive the word, but the vanity



and deception of wealth smothers the word, and they do not bear the fruit of good works. Finally, those who hear the word and preserve it in a good and pure heart and bear fruit in patience are the seed that fell upon good soil.

The amount of fruits depends on the efforts of the person working out his salvation. The holy fathers usually understand the thirty-fold fruit to be those who have achieved salvation in marriage, the sixty-fold fruit to be pious widows and widowers, and the hundred-fold fruit to be those who have found salvation in virginity or martyrdom.

Christ then told them another parable. The Kingdom of God, He said, is like a man who sowed his field with good seed. At night an enemy came and planted tares [wheat-like weeds—*Auth.*]. When the plants sprouted the tares likewise became visible.

The servants came to their master and asked, “Did you not sow your field with good seed? Where then did the tares come from?”



“An enemy has sown them,” the master replied.

But the servant’s request to pull up the tares met with the master’s refusal. He said, *Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn* (Mt. 13:29–30).

Later the Lord explained this parable. The master is God. The field is the world. The wheat is the sons of the Kingdom who do the will of God. The tares are the sons of the devil, the heretics and sinners. The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The servants of God are the Angels. God does not allow them to destroy sinners, for He knows that many of these will repent. The harvest is the end of the world. Then at God’s command the angels will gather all the sinners and cast them into the eternal fire, but the righteous they will lead into the habitation of God. There they will shine as the sun, in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father.

He told them yet another parable. The Kingdom of God is also like a mustard seed that a person plants in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows it becomes taller than all other trees, and the birds of the heavens come and nest in its branches.

In the same way the preaching of the apostles, of whom there were only twelve, is pungent, like mustard, and has encompassed the whole world. From it grew the Church, the peak of which reaches up to the Heavens, where the angels enter it. The same is true of each individual Christian. If he considers himself the least of all men, but at the same time burns with the fire of zeal for God, he becomes more exalted than all men, and the angels receive him.

Likewise, Christ says that the Kingdom of God is like a seed that was cast into the ground. A person may rise from sleep day and night, but he does not see how the seed grows. Yet it first produces the shoot, then the ear, then the grain in the ear. When the fruit ripens the sickle is immediately sent, because the time for the harvest has arrived.

In the same way, righteousness gradually grows in a person, who does not notice this himself, but when it becomes permanence and perfection God immediately takes that person to Himself.

Likewise, the Kingdom of God is like a woman who placed leaven in three measures of flour until it was entirely leavened. The woman is the Church. She placed the apostles into the world, who with their preaching leavened the whole world that had been populated by Noah’s three sons. In the same way the Church infuses with grace the three energies of the soul—the mind, the feelings, and the will—until all is permeated with sanctity.

To obtain the Kingdom, however, one must renounce all things. It is like a treasure hidden in a field. A person finds it, and in his joy he sells everything he has and buys that field.

Or the Kingdom is like a merchant, a collector of beautiful pearls, who upon finding a single precious pearl sells everything and buys that pearl.

Christ then asked the disciples, “Do you understand this?”

They answered him, “Yes, Lord!”

He then said, “For this reason every scribe who is learned in the Kingdom of God is like a householder who brings out of his storeroom what is new [things of the Gospel] and what is old [things of prophecy].”

## THE BEHEADING OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Mt. 11:2–19, 14:1–12; Mk. 6:14–29; Lk. 9:7–9)

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Soon after the Lord’s baptism Saint John the Baptist was arrested by Herod, king of Galilee, and put into prison—the fortress of Machaerus. The king was angry at the prophet for rebuking him for his lawless marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herodias tried to have the saint killed, but Herod was afraid of a public outcry. Besides, he himself liked to listen to the prophet.

While the Baptist was in prison he sent two of his disciples, who doubted that Jesus was the Messiah, to ask Jesus, “Are you He Who is to come, or shall we await another?”

At the time the Lord was working numerous miracles of healing. To John’s disciples He said, quoting the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the coming of God (Is. 35:5–6), *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me* (Mt. 11:4–6).

When they had gone the Lord said to the people concerning John, “He is a prophet, and more than a prophet. He it is of whom it was written: ‘Behold, I send My angel before your face, to prepare your way before you.’ Truly I say to you, of those born of women none has arisen greater than John the Baptist, but the least [i.e., the younger, meaning Christ Himself—*Auth.*] in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by violence, and the violent take it by force. All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. He is Elijah who is to come.” (For John fulfilled the ministry of the prophet Elijah, who rebuked the people for their impiety.)

In the meantime Herod’s birthday arrived, and he held a great feast for his nobles. When all were drunk with wine, Herodias’ daughter Solome danced and pleased the king. He swore that he would grant her any request,





and would even give her half his kingdom. She asked her mother's advice, then said: "Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter this instant."

The king was saddened, but he would not break his oath (though this was the only way he could have kept God's Law). He commanded that she be given what she had asked. A soldier beheaded the prophet in prison, and his head was brought to Salome, who gave it to her mother. In a rage Herodias pierced the Forerunner's tongue, and wanted to sink it in an unclean place. But secret disciples of the Lord buried it on the Mount of Olives, where it was found in the 4th century. John's disciples buried his body in a tomb. Thus the greatest of the prophets and the baptizer of the Lord died for God's truth.

The soul of John the Baptist descended into hades, and there he became the Forerunner of Christ. In hades he proclaimed the coming salvation to the dead.

The beheading of John the Baptist is commemorated on **September 11**.

## THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

(Mt. 14:13–21, Mk. 6:30–44, Lk. 9:10–17, Jn. 6:1–14)

Not long before the Passover the Lord was teaching the people near the Sea of Tiberias. It was toward evening, yet the city was still some way off.

Then Christ, testing Philip, asked, “Where can we buy bread to feed them?”

“Two hundred dinarii would not be enough for each of them to have even a little,” the apostle replied.

Andrew said that one boy had five barley loaves and two fishes, but what was that to such a multitude?

Then Christ commanded that all be seated on the grass in groups of fifty and of a hundred. Looking toward heaven, the Lord Jesus blessed the bread,

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broke it, and gave it to the disciples. He also divided the fish, to be given to the people. And all ate and were filled. Then He commanded that the remnants be gathered. Twelve full baskets of pieces of bread and fish were collected. Yet the people who had eaten numbered over five thousand men, not counting women and children.

Thus Christ showed that He is the One Who created green herbs on the third day, and fish on the fifth. In addition, this miracle prepared men for the teaching regarding the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Both then and now at each Liturgy Christ Himself gives thanks to the Father, and through His disciples (the successors of the apostles) He distributes the bread of His Body to Christians assembled in parishes. His Body does not diminish, and all are filled, just as it happened then.

## THE WALKING ON THE WATER

(Mt. 14:22–32, Mk. 6:45–52, Jn. 6:15–21)

Immediately after the multiplication of the loaves the Lord commanded the apostles to sail to the opposite shore of the lake, while He sent the people away. Upon learning that the crowds, delighted with the miracle, wanted to make Him king, He went away from them into a mountain to pray. In the evening whirlwinds descended upon the sea from the mountain, and the disciples were in danger. The sea was swamping their boat with waves. Seeing their plight by His clairvoyant power, Christ went to their aid, walking over the waves. It was late at night (around three or four in the morning). And upon seeing Him the disciples were frightened and cried out, thinking it was a ghost.

But Christ calmed them: “It is I; do not be afraid!”

Then Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to you over the water.”

“Come,” Jesus replied.

And Peter came. But when he looked at the waves and saw that the wind was very strong, he was afraid, and immediately the Divine power left him. And he began to sink.

“Lord, save me!” the apostle cried.

Immediately Christ took him by the hand and said, “Oh you of little faith! Why did you doubt?”

Entering the ship, He forbade the wind, and suddenly all grew calm. All those who were in the boat bowed down before Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

In the same way, if Christians trust God they are able to walk confidently over the boisterous waves of the sea of life, but the moment a person



decides to make his own amendments to God's plan he immediately begins to drown in the abyss of evil. When this occurs we should not attempt to swim to safety, depending on our own diseased intelligence, but should call out to Christ the Savior in prayer, and He will immediately draw us out of any abyss.



## THE SERMON CONCERNING THE HEAVENLY BREAD (Jn. 6:22–71)

When the Lord reached the other side of the lake with His disciples, the inhabitants came running to have the Savior heal their sick. All who touched His garments were healed. During this the people whom He had fed the day before came running to meet Him, and wondered how He had arrived there.

But the Lord said, *Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for Him hath God the Father sealed* (Jn. 6:26–27).

They asked, “What should we do in order to do the works of God?”

“It is the work of God to believe in Him Whom He has sent,” the Lord replied.

The people again began demanding a sign (wanting to eat their fill of the miraculous bread once more), citing their ancestors, to whom Moses had given manna in the wilderness for forty years.

But Jesus answered them, “Truly I say to you that it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven, but My Father will give you the true Bread from Heaven: He Who descends from the Heavens and gives life to the world.”

“Give us this bread always,” the Jews asked, thinking that He was speaking of ordinary food.

Then Christ said, “I am the Bread of Life. He that comes to Me shall not hunger, and he that believes in Me shall never thirst. All that the Father has given Me shall come to Me, and him that comes to Me I will not drive away. For I descended from the heavens not to do My own will, but the will of the Father. And His will is for Me not to lose anyone of those He has given Me, but to resurrect all on the last day.”

The Jews began to murmur against Him for saying that He had descended from the heavens.

Jesus replied, “Do not murmur amongst yourselves. No one can come to Me if My Father does not draw him, and I will resurrect him on the last day. Everyone who is taught by God [as the prophets foretold—*Auth.*] comes to Me. For no one sees the Father but the One Who Is from God. He has seen the Father. Truly I tell you that he who believes in Me shall have Life eternal. I am the Bread of life. Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and died, but the Bread that descends from the heavens is such that whoever eats of it shall live forever. The bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I give for the life of the world.”

The Jews began to argue amongst themselves: “How can He give us His flesh to eat?”

Jesus answered, “Truly I say to you, if you do not eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you will not have life in yourselves. He that eats

My Flesh and drinks My Blood has Life Eternal, and I will resurrect him on the last day. For My Flesh is true food, and my Blood is true drink. He that eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent Me and I live in the Father, so also he that eats Me will live by Me. This is the Bread that has descended from the Heavens. Not like your fathers, who ate the manna and died; he who eats this Bread will live forever.”

Upon hearing this the disciples said, “This is a hard thing to say! Who can listen to it?”

Knowing that many were murmuring, the Lord said, “Are you offended at this? What if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? The spirit enlivens, but the flesh is of no benefit. My words are Spirit and Life, but among you there are some who do not believe. I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is given to him by My Father.”

Thus He showed that He knew which of them were unbelievers, as well, and Judas, who was planning to betray Him.

From that day on many of the disciples left Him and ceased following Him. And to this day the news that in Holy Communion we partake of the true Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine repulses many. Some leave the Church for sects (Protestant denominations and others), while others attempt to distort the clear teaching by heresies.

The Lord did not call the apostates to return. Rather, turning to the twelve apostles He asked, “Do you also wish to leave?”

“To whom are we to go?” Peter responded. “You have the words of Life Eternal. And we have believed and recognized that You are the Son of the Living God.”

“Did I not choose twelve? And one of you is a devil,” the Lord replied sadly, by these words indicating Judas Iscariot, who intended to betray Him.

## THE LORD AND THE REPENTANT SINFUL WOMAN (Jn. 7:1 – 8:11)

**T**he autumn Feast of Tabernacles arrived, and the Lord secretly entered Jerusalem. At midfeast He entered the Temple and taught the people, despite the indignation of the scribes.

He exclaimed, “I have come not of My own Self, but He that sent Me is true, Whom you do not know. I know Him because I am from Him, and He has sent Me.”

The Jews attempted to arrest Him, but were unable, since His appointed time had not yet come.

On the last day of the feast Christ said, *If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water* (Jn. 7:37–38).

This He said concerning the Spirit, Whom those who believed in Him received.

And again the Pharisees sent their servants to arrest Christ. But they returned empty-handed, saying, “No one has ever spoken like this man!”

In the morning Christ again came to the Temple, and a woman was brought to Him who had been surprised in the act of adultery. The Pharisees who sought Him said, “Teacher, this woman was committing adultery, and the Law of Moses commands that such people be stoned. What do you say?” But Jesus Christ silently bent down and wrote in the sand with His finger. “Whoever of you is without sin, let him throw the first stone at her,” He answered.

And again, bending down, He wrote on the ground. Seeing this, all the accusers withdrew, accused by their own conscience. Straightening, the Lord saw the woman standing there alone.

“No one has condemned you, and I do not condemn you. Go and do not sin again.”

Thus the Son of God showed the full greatness of His mercy, which forgives sin and cleanses any transgression of one who comes to Him.

## THE HEALING OF THE MAN WHO WAS BORN BLIND (Jn. 9)

After forgiving the sinful woman the Lord spoke to the people:

“I am the light of the world. He that follows after Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The Jews began asking Christ, “Who are You?”

He replied, “He Who Is from the beginning. When you raise up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, so I speak. If you abide in My word you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. You do not receive My word because you do the works of your father. Your father is the devil, and you do his lusts. He was a murderer from the beginning, who did not stand firm in the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie he is speaking of his own, because he is a liar and the father of lies. Truly I tell you, whoever keeps My Word will never see death.”



The Jews said, “We said that there is a demon in You. Abraham and the prophets died. What are you making Yourself out to be?”

“I know the Father,” the Lord replied. “Abraham was glad to see My day, and he saw it and rejoiced.”

“You are not yet fifty years old, yet you have seen Abraham?” the Hebrews cried.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am* (Jn. 8:58), Christ testified.

Then the Jews attempted to stone Him, but Christ miraculously became invisible and passed through their midst.

As He went He saw a man who was blind from birth. The disciples asked Christ, “Teacher, tell us, who sinned, he or his parents, that he was born blind?”

“Neither he nor his parents sinned, but in order that the glory of God might be revealed in him,” the Lord replied, repudiating the obligatory link between illness and sin, to say nothing of the transmigration of souls. “While I am in the world I am the light of the world.”

Having said this, Jesus Christ spat upon the ground, infusing it with the life-creating power of His lips, made mud, and anointed the eyes of the blind man. Thus of the same earth from which Adam was originally created the Creator made eyeballs for the blind man. After this the Lord sent him to wash in the pool of Siloam, so that many would witness the miracle. He went, washed, and returned seeing.

His neighbors and acquaintances were so amazed that they even thought it was a different person. The Pharisees were so astounded that they sought a means to disprove the miracle, for it had been worked on the Sabbath. But in this they failed. Then they decided to convince the man who was healed that it was not Jesus Who had given him sight, as He was a supposedly a sinner, but God Himself.

To this the man who was born blind replied, “I do not know whether or not He is a sinner. One thing I know: before I was blind, but now I see. If Jesus were not of God He would be able to do nothing.”

“Why, you were completely born in sins, and you would teach us?!” the Pharisees exclaimed in a fury, and drove him out.

Later in the temple Jesus met the man who had received his sight, and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” asked the man who was healed.

“You have both seen Him, and it is He that is talking with you,” Christ replied.

“I believe, Lord!” cried the man who was born blind, and he worshiped Him.

The Lord replied, *For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see [the proud] might be made blind* (Jn. 9:39).

## THE HEALING OF THE DAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN (Mt. 15:21–28, Mk. 7:24–30)

Christ came to Phoenicia (now southern Lebanon), and a woman who was a pagan ran up to meet Him.

“Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David!” she cried. “My daughter is cruelly possessed!”

But He answered her nothing, for as the Knower of hearts He wished to show her strong faith. The disciples began asking Christ to send her away.

The Lord replied, “I am only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

The woman approached Him, and bowing down she said, “Lord, help me!”

“It is not right to take bread from the children and throw it to dogs,” Christ said, testing her faith and showing that to Him paganism is impurity.

But the woman humbly replied, *Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table* (Mt. 15:27).

Then Jesus Christ said, *O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt* (Mt. 15:28).



And her daughter was healed that very hour. This miracle symbolizes the Church of the Gentiles, which before was unclean, like a dog, but which was vouchsafed to partake of the holy Body of the Lord. The members of this Church became the sons of God, while the Jews were deprived of the Divine gifts.

## THE CONFESSION OF PETER (Mt. 16:13–28)

Christ and the disciples came to the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi. The Lord began asking the apostles whom men thought Him to be.

The apostles replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, or Jeremiah, or another of the prophets.”

“But whom do you think Me to be?”

“You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the Living God,” Peter replied, speaking for all the apostles.

Then Jesus said, *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say*

*also unto thee, That thou art Peter [“the Rock”], and upon this rock [of your faith] I will build My church; and the gates of hell [heresies, persecutions, and schisms] shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Mt. 16:17–19).

After this Jesus Christ began foretelling that in Jerusalem He would be arrested, and He would be mocked and killed, but on the third day He would rise again. Peter, moved by human pity, began urging the Lord to escape this fate, but He replied, *Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*



Then, turning to all the disciples, Jesus said, *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself [his own selfhood], and take up his cross [of suffering], and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it [by perishing for eternity]; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom* (Mt. 16:23–28).

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

(Mt. 16:28–17, Mk. 9:1–13, Lk. 9:27–36, 2 Pet. 1:16–18)

The time of the Lord's sufferings approached, and in order to strengthen the faith of the disciples for the coming trials Christ showed forth His Divinity to a select few. While still in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus Christ said:

"Truly I say to you, there are some of those standing here that shall not taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom.

Six days after these words the Lord ascended holy Mount Tabor to pray to His Father, taking with Him His three closest disciples: Peter and Zebedee's sons James and John.

And as Jesus was praying the appearance of His face was changed. It began to shine more brightly than the sun. And His clothing became white and brilliant, whiter than any bleach could have made it, resembling light. Thus the Lord showed the radiance of the Divinity concealed within Him, for He had always been as the apostles now beheld Him. The uncreated light surrounding Jesus is the eternal radiance and glory of God, the uncreated grace bestowed upon those who are saved. And these rays permeated the Most-pure Body of Christ and transfigured even His clothing—not like Moses, the skin of whose face alone began to shine while God was speaking with him. The Lord Jesus is the True Light, born of the True Light.

And before Jesus there appeared two of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament, who even then had seen a glimmer of that Radiant Face. These were Moses, the mediator in the establishment of the Old Testament, and Elijah, who had seen the Creator on Horeb and been taken up alive into Heaven. In this manner Jesus Christ showed that He is the ruler both of hades, from whence He had summoned Moses' immortal soul, and of paradise, from whence Elijah had been called.

The prophets, who appeared in glory, surrounded by the uncreated radiance, spoke with Jesus of the sufferings that He was to endure in Jerusalem.





During His prayer the disciples had been sleeping, but the radiance awakened them. Seeing that the prophets were departing, Peter cried out, “Lord, it is good for us to be here! If you wish, we will make three tents here—one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

But he did not know what he was saying, for Jesus had yet to suffer, and only then to enter into glory. So also, though on earth we sense in some mea-

sure the extraordinary joy of communion with God, we must remember that this is a mere glimmer of the radiance to come. Further on the path leads us to the cross.

While Peter was still speaking a radiant cloud appeared and covered the mountain. This was that cloud of the Divine Presence that had guided the exodus from Egypt, overshadowed the tabernacle, and sanctified Solomon's Temple. In the form of a cloud on Tabor the Holy Spirit appeared.

And from the cloud came the voice of God the Father: *This is My beloved Son: hear Him* (Lk. 9:35).

Upon hearing this voice the disciples fell face down upon the ground in reverent terror. But Jesus touched them, saying, "Fear not."

Looking up, they saw before them only their Teacher in His usual aspect. And as they were descending from the mountain the Lord forbade them to speak of what they had seen until His Resurrection. The disciples first asked each other what He meant by "resurrect from the dead." For they thought that the Messiah was immortal. Then they asked the Lord why the scribes had said that before the coming of the Messiah Elijah must come first.

Jesus answered, "Yes, Elijah must come and set everything in order. But he has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did with him as they wished."

Thus the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist—the Forerunner of the First Coming of Christ, as Elijah will be the Forerunner of the Second Coming. This manifestation revealed to all men what is prepared for the saved in the Father's Kingdom. They will shine as the sun with the rays of uncreated light that proceed from the Body of Christ. And God will stand among the gods—the Christians adopted to sonship—and will give them that sweetness that the apostles experienced on the holy mountain. And an eternal feast of tabernacles (tents) will begin, when those who have resurrected in renewed bodies will draw inexhaustible bliss from the Savior.

The feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord is one of the twelve great feasts and is observed on August 19, forty days before the Exaltation of the Cross of the Lord. For according to Tradition this event occurred forty days before the Crucifixion. On this day the fruits of the new harvest are blessed in the churches, reminding the faithful of the fullness of blessedness in Paradise.

## THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL (Lk. 12:13–34)

Once the Lord was approached by a man who asked Him to convince his brother to give him an inheritance. Seeing the avarice concealed in his soul, Christ told a parable about how a person's life does not depend on his property.



A certain rich man had fields that produced a large harvest. He found himself faced with the question of what to do. There were not enough barns to hold the harvest. “Here is what I will do,” he decided. “I will tear down my old barns and build bigger ones. And I will say to my soul: ‘You have considerable goods laid up for many years. Eat, drink, and be merry!’” As though one’s lifespan were linked to the yield of one’s fields!

But God answered him, “You fool! This night dread angels shall tear your soul from you. Who then will possess what you have laid up?”

And so it shall be with everyone who stores up riches for himself rather than for God. (To accumulate riches for God means to give to the poor—as Blessed Theophylact said, “The bellies of the poor are your barns,” — and to remember that all things are God’s and must serve unto His glory.)

Hence, do not take care for your own life—what to eat, drink, or wear. God feeds even the ravens, and adorns the lilies of the field; how much better then does He know your needs? Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and all this will be added to you. The Father has decided to give you a Kingdom. Hence, give away your possessions to the poor, that you may have treasure in the Heavens, beyond the reach of thieves or moths. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.



## THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST DRACHMA (Mt. 18:10–14, Lk. 15:3–10)

**S**inners would come to Christ to listen to Him. But the Pharisees murmured that the Lord was receiving sinners and eating with them. Then He told them a parable of the grace of God:

“Which of you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one in the mountains, will not go out to find it? And finding it he takes it upon his shoulders and brings it home, and rejoices with his neighbors that the lost sheep has been found. Likewise in the heavens there is greater joy over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous men.”

The owner of the sheep is Christ, and the sheep are men, who by their sins have distanced themselves from God and lost Him. Then the Son of God Himself comes to them, to save His creation and bring it to the Heavenly Father. And all the angels in the Heavens rejoice more over those that are saved than over their own sinless selves. This is also described in another of Christ’s parables:

“What woman who has ten drachmas and loses one will not search for the one that was lost? She lights a candle and searches carefully until she finds it. And when she finds it she gathers her friends to rejoice over the

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coin that was found. So also the angels rejoice over a single penitent sinner.”

The woman is an image of God’s Wisdom, of Christ, Who lost His creation. He did not leave men to perish, but first lit candles—the prophets, particularly the Forerunner—and then Himself found the coin—man, created in the image of God—and brought him to the angels that they might rejoice. Hence, we too must not despair if we commit sins, but must immediately repent before God, that we may receive forgiveness.

## THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

(Lk. 15:11–32)

**I**n order to show that God accepts everyone who comes to Him, Christ told the parable of the prodigal son.

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A certain man had two sons, and the younger said to their father, “Give me the share of your property that is to be mine after your death.”

Thus, in his eyes his father was as though already dead. The passions had clouded his vision, and he saw only the anticipated life of luxury from which his father was keeping him. The father is God, our Creator, and the youngest son is every sinner who considers God to be distant and as good as dead.

Seeing the state he was in, his father gave him what he wanted. Shortly thereafter, having liquidated his possessions, his son left for a far-off country, where he squandered all his property on debauchery and idleness. So also God, seeing our hardness of heart, permits us to act according to our own will, and we depart far from the Lord into the dark country of sin. There we quickly lose all our natural abilities, which disintegrate through sin.

When he had spent all that he had, a terrible famine began in that country. Finding himself lacking even the necessities, he found employment with one of the citizens of that country (i.e., a demon), thinking the evil spirit would keep him fed. But that citizen sent him to care for pigs (an extremely unclean occupation to the Hebrews), i.e., to teach others to commit unclean deeds as well. He would have been glad to eat the husks (the nearly inedible pods of the locust tree) that the pigs ate, but no one gave them to him. For sin gives no satisfaction. In God alone our hearts find rest.

Then the prodigal son came to his senses—for a person who sins is in a kind of fog, seeing neither himself nor the Lord—and he said to himself:

“How many hired servants in my father’s house eat their fill of bread, while I am dying of hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to

him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son! Receive me as one of your hired servants.’”

This is what occurs at the moment of repentance. A person realizes the pit into which he has fallen, remembers the Creator, and if he overcomes his pride he can return to Him.

While the son was still far off, the father saw him and had pity on him. He ran to meet him and embraced him.

The son began his rehearsed speech, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no longer worthy to be called your son ....”

But the father did not let him equate himself to the hired servants, for even a prodigal son still remains a son. The grace of baptism cannot be washed away. The father said to his servants, “Bring the best clothing and dress him; put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Slaughter the fattened calf, and let us make merry, for my son was dead and has returned to life; he was lost and is found.”

The *clothing* is an image of the grace of baptism. The *servants* are the angels of repentance or the priests. The *ring* is the pledge of the Holy Spirit, which gives the power to do good works, and a sign of participation in the Kingdom of Heaven, for since ancient times the ring has been a sign of power. The *shoes* on his feet are a sign that once again he has the right to be in his father’s house. For in the East guests remove their shoes upon entering a house, while the master leaves his shoes on. The shoes are also God’s protection, which surrounds one who repents. The *fatted calf* is the mystical Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ.

The eldest son worked the entire day in the field, and as he approached the house he heard music and dancing. Calling a servant, he asked him, “What is going on?”

The servant replied, “Your brother has returned, and your father has received him with joy, because he has received him safe and sound.”

The eldest son did not wish to go into the house. Then the father came out to him and invited him in, but he replied to his father:

“I have served you for so many years, and never disobeyed your orders, but you never gave me so much as a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has squandered your property with harlots, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him!”

The father replied, “My son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But it is right to rejoice that your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”

The eldest son is those righteous people who are indignant that God has mercy on sinners, yet fails to protect them in this life. The Lord, however, teaches them to imitate His love for mankind and not to fall into condemnation of sinners, whose repentance their Maker always awaits.

## THE PARABLE OF THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD (Lk. 16:1–13)

There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and it was reported to the rich man that the steward was squandering his property. The master summoned him and said, “Give me a report of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.”

Then the steward said to himself, “What am I to do? I cannot dig, and I am ashamed to beg. Here is what I will do, so that I may be welcome in the homes of others when I am no longer steward ...” He summoned his master’s debtors and asked how much each owed. Those who owed a hundred measures of wheat he commanded to ammend their debt to fifty, and those who owed a hundred measures of oil to eighty. And the master praised him for acting so prudently, for the sons of this age are more prudent than the sons of light in their generation. And Christ commands us also: make friends using the riches of unrighteousness, so that when you are in want you may be received into the eternal habitations. *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much* (Lk. 16:10). *No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon* (Lk. 16:13).

Hearing this the Pharisees laughed at Him, for they loved money. But Christ said, *Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God* (Lk. 16:15).

The *master* of the house is God, and the *steward* is man. The *property* is all that we have (our bodies and our riches). It must bear fruit for God through almsgiving. The *debtors* are those who have offended us and committed sins against us. If we forgive their sins and give alms, after death they will pray to God for us, and He will receive us into the Heavenly Habitations.

## THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (Lk. 16:19–31)

Speaking to the lovers of money, who said that riches are what matters most, and did not help the poor, Christ told them the tale of the rich man and Lazarus.

A certain man was quite rich. He dressed in scarlet (royal) clothing and fine linen (a delicate white fabric), and spent all his days at sumptuous feasts. The Savior does not give his name, for the names of sinners are blotted out from the Book of Life.

At his gate there lay a sick pauper named Lazarus (“He whom God helps”), all covered with sores. He would gladly have filled his belly with even the scraps from the rich man’s table, but no one gave them to him. And only the dogs licked his wounds, treating him like a corpse while he was still alive. Yet through all this never a murmur escaped Lazarus’ lips, and he patiently endured his misfortune.

At last Lazarus died. The angels took his soul and carried it to the bosom of the hospitable Abraham, to a special place in the world beyond the grave where the righteous dwelt. The rich man also died, and was buried, and his soul found itself in gloomy hades, surrounded by flames. Looking up, he saw Abraham, and there, sitting at his feet, was that very Lazarus whom he had despised during his lifetime.

Then the rich man cried out, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to wet his finger in water and cool my tongue! For I am suffering in this flame.”

But Abraham replied, “My child, remember that you have already received everything good during your life, while Lazarus received evil things. Hence he is comforted here, while you suffer. Besides, between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, so none may pass either from us to you or from you to us.”

Then the rich man asked, “I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my five brothers. Let him bear witness to them, that they might not end up in this place of torment!”

Abraham said, “They have the Scripture of Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.”

The rich man replied, “No, they do not listen to them, but if a man rises from the dead they will repent.”

Then Abraham said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if a person rises from the dead.”

Thus the Lord teaches us to endure troubles with patience, that we may receive an eternal reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, but that the eternal fire of hades awaits the merciless and the mercenary. Furthermore, Christ says that we do not need any particular miracles. God has given us everything we need in Holy Scripture, and by following it we will not become lost on our lives’ paths.

## THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS (Lk. 17:11–19)

As He was going up to Jerusalem, Christ passed through a certain village. At the entrance He was met by ten lepers, who cried, “Jesus, Teacher! Have mercy on us!”

He commanded them, in compliance with the Law (Lev. 13:2–49), to show themselves to the priests, that they might testify to their healing. When they believed Him and went they were immediately healed of their incurable illness. Then one of them ran back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and fell on his face before Jesus. This man was not a right-believing Jew, but a Samaritan.

Then Jesus said, “Were not ten cleansed? Where then are the nine? Why have they not returned to glorify God, but only this foreigner?”

And He said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has saved you.”

We too must learn to give thanks to God for His great wonders. Otherwise our faith will prove flawed.

## THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST JUDGE

(Lk. 17:20–37, 18:1–8)

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Once the Pharisees asked Christ when the Kingdom of God would come. To this He replied, *The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you* (Lk. 17:20–21).

The coming of the Kingdom is when our souls contain nothing worldly, but in all things we act superior to the world, angelically, as God Himself commanded.

But lest they think that the Kingdom within abolishes the obvious Coming of Christ in glory, He foretells to His disciples:

“The days will come when you will wish to see even one of My days, and you will not. *And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in His day*” (Lk. 17:23–24).

First, however, He is to be cast away by this people. Before His coming the world will be as in the days of Noah before the flood, or of Lot before the destruction of Sodom. Christ will come suddenly and will divide all the living. One will be taken, and another left. Remember Lot’s wife, therefore. Whoever strives to save his own life will lose his soul.

Awaiting that Great Day and the tribulations preceding it, we must pray unceasingly and not despair. To explain this the Lord told the parable of the unjust judge:

“In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and had no shame before men. In those parts there lived a widow, who demanded that he defend her from her adversary, who was robbing her. For a long time the judge refused to trouble himself about the matter. But at last he said to him-





self, 'Though I do not fear God, and have no shame of men, since this widow gives me no peace I will defend her, so that she will stop coming to weary me.' Hear what the unjust judge says! Will not God then defend His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night, though He is slow to defend them? I tell you that He will defend them suddenly. But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

### THE PARABLE OF THE PUBLICAN AND THE PHARISEE (Lk. 18:9-14)

**T**he Lord addressed the following parable to those who considered themselves righteous while demeaning others.

Once two men entered the temple of God to pray. One of them was a Pharisee, an expert in the Law, while the other was a publican, a tax collector for the occupying government, an extortionist and a bribe-taker.

The Pharisee went forward and inwardly prayed thus: “O God, I thank You that I am not like other people—thieves, unjust, adulterers, or even like this publican! I fast twice a week, and I pay a tithe of all I acquire!”

The Pharisee took credit for his perfection, rather than crediting God, and thus he poisoned all his merits with the venom of pridefulness. This arrogance led to his condemnation of others, which is contrary to the will of the Creator.

Meanwhile the publican stood a ways off and, not daring to look up toward heaven, said, *God be merciful to me a sinner* (Lk. 18:13).

“I tell you,” Christ said, “that he left the church more righteous than the other, because everyone who exalts himself will be abased, while he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

These words of Christ teach us to avoid pride and condemnation, which are displeasing to God, particularly in prayer, and to learn the humility of the publican, which is able to cover a multitude of crimes.

## THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL LENDER

(Mt. 18:15–35)

**I**n teaching the apostles the Lord gave them a command regarding how to treat those who sin against them:

“If your brother sins against you, first rebuke him in private. If he asks your forgiveness, you have gained your brother. If he will not listen to you, gather two or three witnesses. If he will not listen to them either, tell the church. If he will not hear even the church, let him be to you as a pagan and a publican. *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*” (Mt. 18:18).

Based on these words the Church knows that priests—the successors of the apostles—have the power to forgive or to bind men’s sins.

Christ went on to say that His Heavenly Father would fulfill the unanimous request of two or three of His disciples, since where two or three are gathered in Christ’s name He Himself is there in their midst.

Then the apostle Peter asked, “How many times a day should I forgive one who has sinned? Up to seven times?”

Christ replied, “Not up to seven, but to seventy times seven” (i.e., infinitely).

To explain this He told a parable:



“There was a king to whom a man was brought who owed him ten thousand talants [fifty tons of silver]. He was unable to repay, and the king ordered that he and his family be sold into slavery. The wretch fell on his knees and begged for more time to pay, saying, ‘Have patience, and I will pay you everything!’ The king took pity on him and forgave him the entire debt. Upon leaving the king, the man saw a friend of his who owed him a hundred dinarii [a few hundred dollars according to our reckoning]. He seized him by the throat and yelled, ‘Give me what you owe me!’ The other fell on his knees before him and said, ‘Have patience, and I will pay you everything!’ But the lender would not, and threw him into debtor’s prison. Seeing what had happened, his companions were very grieved and told the king of this. In anger the ruler summoned him and said, ‘O wicked and evil servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you implored me. Should you not have had mercy on your own debtor, as I had mercy on you?’ Then the king gave him over to the torturers until he had paid his debt in full. So also the Heavenly Father will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his transgressions.”

Indeed, each of us is incomparably more indebted to God than each of us is to one another. Hence, we must not bear grudges if we do not want God to remind us of all the iniquities we have been forgiven in the Sacrament of Confession on the Day of Judgment.

## THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS (Jn. 11)

Not long before Pascha Christ worked His greatest miracle: the resurrection of the righteous Lazarus. At that time Lazarus fell ill, and his sisters, Martha and Mary, sent word of this to Jesus Christ.

The Lord replied, "This illness is not unto death, but that the glory of God might be revealed."

After this Christ went to Judea. When the disciples began reminding Him that the Jews wanted to kill Him, He replied, "Lazarus our friend has died. I am going to wake him, and I am glad for you that we were not there, so that you may believe."

When Jesus Christ came to Bethany, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany is next to Jerusalem, about three kilometers off. And many of the Jews came to the family of the deceased to comfort them. When Martha heard that Christ had come to Bethany she ran to meet Him:

"Lord" she cried, "if You had been here my brother would not have died! But even now I know that whatever you ask of God He will give You."

"Your brother shall rise again," the Lord replied.

"I know that he will rise again on the Last Day," Martha replied.

*I am the resurrection, and the life, Christ said. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believeth thou this?* (Jn. 11:25–26).

"I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, Who has come into the world," Martha said.

After this she called her sister Mary. Mary came running to the Lord Jesus and likewise expressed her regret that the Lord had not healed her brother. When He saw her crying He Himself wept. Sorrowing inwardly, Christ came to the cave tomb. There He commanded that the stone be rolled away from the entrance to the sepulcher.

"Lord," Martha said, "he already stinks, since he has already been in the tomb four days!"

But Christ replied, "Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?"

The stone was rolled away, and having given thanks to the Father for always hearing Him the Lord cried out, "Lazarus, come forth!"

And the dead man came forth, bound hand and foot with a winding sheet, and with his face covered; yet the bonds did not prevent him from climbing the steep steps. Thus the power of God proved more powerful than death and the laws of nature. Then Jesus Christ commanded that Lazarus be unbound, that all those present might be convinced of the miracle's authenticity.

When they learned of this sign the high priests were furious, and resolved to kill both Christ and Lazarus, so as not to lose their power over the people. Hence, Tradition relates that after his resurrection Lazarus sailed to Cyprus, where he lived for thirty years and served as bishop.

The resurrection of the righteous Lazarus showed that God wishes to resurrect men in the flesh, of which this miracle was a prefiguration.

The resurrection of the righteous Lazarus is commemorated on the eve of Palm Sunday (Lazarus Saturday).

## THE ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM

(Mt. 21:1–17, Mk. 11:1–11, Lk. 19:28–44, Jn. 12:1–19)

Six days before the Hebrew Passover Christ again came to Bethany, where a feast was held for Him in the house of Simon the Leper. Lazarus also reclined with Him at the feast, and Martha served Him. But Mary took a vessel of precious ointment and anointed Christ's feet with it, and wiped them with her hair.

Judas Iscariot, showing his "practical side," indignantly inquired as to the purpose of this waste on the Lord. It would have been better, he said, to sell the ointment and give the money to the poor. In actuality he would have liked to steal the money himself. But Christ approved of Mary's act, and said that she had done this in preparation for His burial.

The next day Jesus Christ went to Jerusalem, and as they were approaching the village of Bethphage He sent his disciples to bring Him an ass and her colt, upon which no one had ever sat. This they did. When they were unhitching them, their owners asked, "What are you doing?" The disciples answered, as Christ had instructed them, that the Lord had need of them. Then they let them go.

The disciples laid their clothes upon the animals, and the Lord mounted the ass's colt and rode into the holy city. A multitude of disciples joyfully began to glorify God for all the miracles Christ had performed.

"Blessed is the King that comes in the name of the Lord," they cried. "Peace in the Heavens and glory in the highest!"

The people likewise cried out, "Hosanna ["salvation"] in the highest! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the Son of David!"

They spread their outer garments beneath Christ's feet, and waved young palm fronds as a sign of the victorious, triumphant procession of the lawful King of the house of David. And little children, fulfilling the words of Psalm 8, cried out to Christ, "Hosanna!"





The Pharisees were indignant, and demanded that they be silent, but the Lord replied, “If they fall silent the stones will cry out!”

When Christ was approaching the city, gazing at it He wept and said, “Oh, if only you had realized today what would bring you peace! The days will come when you will be surrounded with trenches and razed to your foundations, because you did not recognize the day of your visitation!”

Entering the holy city, Christ tied the ass’s colt to a golden vine that hung in the gates of the temple, and entering there He healed many of the sick. Thus were fulfilled the ancient prophecies of Zechariah (Zech. 9:9–15) and Jacob (Gen. 49:6–12). Israel saw its Messiah Whom the prophets had promised—a Meek King mounted upon an ass’s colt (a symbol of the Gentiles) and an ass (a symbol of the Jews). He came to save men from eternal destruction at the price of His own Blood.

The people who came running asked, “Who is this?”





To this those who had come with the Lord replied, “This is Jesus, a prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.”

In the temple of the Lord He saw merchants selling animals. Once again, as at the beginning of His ministry, Christ drove the traders out of the temple.

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations,” He said, “but you have made it a den of thieves!”

He forbade even carrying anything through the temple that did not belong there. Having restored order in the sanctuary, Christ left for Bethany.

The great feast of the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, one of the twelve, is celebrated a week before Pascha. On this day palm branches or pussy willows are blessed in the churches, as a symbol of Christ’s victory over death.

## CHRIST'S FINAL SERMONS IN JERUSALEM

(Mt. 21–25; Mk. 1:12–13, 37; Lk. 19:45–21, 36; Jn. 12:20–50)

**T**he next day as the Lord was going to Jerusalem He became hungry. Near the road there was a fig tree growing, covered with leaves. But there was no fruit upon it. Then Christ cursed it, saying, “Let there never again be fruit upon you.”

Immediately the fig tree dried up. Thus He showed that He is not only good, but also just, and punishes evildoers.



The apostles were amazed that the fig tree dried up instantly. But the Lord said: "If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do this, but you will even say to a mountain, 'Arise and cast yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

When He entered the Temple and was teaching, the high priests approached and asked Him, "By what authority do You do this? And who gave You this authority?"

Jesus Christ answered, "I too will ask you a question, and then I will answer you. Where did the baptism of John come from—from Heaven or from men?"

They considered: "If we say from Heaven, He will ask why we did not believe him [for John said that Jesus was the Messiah]. But if we say

from men, the people will stone us."

And so they answered, "We do not know!"

"Then neither will I tell you by what authority I do this," Jesus Christ answered.

Having thus shamed the leaders of the people, Jesus told them several parables concerning the Kingdom of God, from which those who do not believe in Christ will be excluded:

"A certain man planted a vineyard, and dug a place for the winefat [a place for pressing the grapes—*Ed.*], and built a guard tower, and built a wall around it, and rented it to workers, after which he departed. When the time came to gather the fruits he sent his servants after the harvest, but the workers killed first one group, then another. Then the master decided to send them his son, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But they decided that by killing the heir they would be able to seize the inheritance. Hence, they led the son out of the vineyard and killed him. What will the master do when he returns? He will severely punish those evil men, and will give the vineyard to other workers who will turn over the harvest when the time comes."

The meaning of the parable is this: the *Master* is God the Father, who created the *vineyard*—the people of Israel. The *wall* is the Law, which separated Israel from other nations. The *place for the winefat* is the temple, in which sacrifices were offered to God. The *tower* is the writings of the prophets, through which one could learn the will of God. The *workers* are the high priests and scribes, the elders of the people. The *servants* are the prophets God sent, to receive the fruits of good deeds from the Hebrews, but they were killed and persecuted. Finally God the Son comes, whom the elders of Israel



killed, leading Him outside the walls of Jerusalem. This final crime filled the cup of God's longsuffering to overflowing, and the Hebrew people lost their chosen status, which passed on to the Church of the Gentiles.

Likewise, the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast that the King held for His Son. When all was ready He sent His servants to summon the invited guests, but they refused, and some killed the messengers. Then in anger the King burned the cities of those murderers and commanded His servants to go out into the crossroads and gather all who were willing, that the feast might be filled with guests. But when the Master came in to view the guests, among them He saw one who was dressed in ordinary work clothes. He asked him, "Friend, how is it that you have come here without wedding clothes?" (In the East those who did not have festal clothing would rent it.)

The man was silent. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen* (Mt. 22:13–14).

The *King* is God. The *wedding feast* is the Church of God. The *invited guests* are the Hebrews, and *those gathered along the crossroads* are the converted Gentiles. All of them are part of the Church, but if a person does not take care to correct his life he will be cast out.

Then the Pharisees decided to trap Him in His words, so as to turn Him over to the ruler, and they sent their disciples to the Lord.

“Teacher,” they asked Him, “You do not prefer one person over another. Tell us, may one pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

But Christ answered, “Why do you tempt Me, you hypocrites? Bring me a coin with which you pay the tax.”

They gave Him a dinarius. Then the Lord Jesus asked, “Whose image and inscription are on the money?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Christ answered, *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s* (Mt. 22:21).

Thus the Lord commanded Christians to obey the government until it begins to lay claim to what belongs to the Creator alone.

Then Christ was approached by the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead or the existence of angels.

“Teacher,” they asked, “Moses said if a person dies his brother must take his wife for his own and raise up descendents to his brother [Deut. 25:5–6]. There were seven brothers. The first married, then died, leaving no children, as did all the rest. If the dead will arise, whose wife will she be?”

But Christ replied, *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living* (Mt. 22:29–32).

Thus the Lord revealed that after the General Resurrection people will no longer live according to earthly laws, but will enter into the state in which the blessed spirits now abide.

After this the Pharisees asked the Lord, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

He replied, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* (Mt. 22:37–40).

Then Jesus Christ Himself asked the Pharisees, “How is it that people say the Messiah is the son [i.e., the descendent—*Auth.*] of David, while David himself in the Holy Spirit called Him Lord, saying, *The Lord said unto my Lord: Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet* (Ps. 109:1)? If David calls Him Lord, how is He his son?”



And no one could answer Him. This seeming contradiction is explained by the fact that the Messiah is not only a man (the son of David), but also the eternal Son of God, and hence David's Lord.

Then Christ terribly denounced the Pharisees and all their followers to come:

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All that they command you to observe, do it. But do not act as they do. For they say, but do not do. They place unbearable burdens upon men's shoulders [their own severe interpretations of the Law—*Auth.*], while they themselves do not wish to lift even a finger. They do all their works so that men might see them. They love to preside at feasts and assemblies, and for people to call them "teacher." But do not be called teachers, for you have one Teacher—Christ—while you are all brethren. And do not call any man father, for you have one Father: the Heavenly Father. And do not be called masters, for you have one Master: Christ." (By these words the Lord is not forbidding the actual use of the words father and teacher, but rather men's attempts to set themselves in God's place.)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you have shut the Kingdom of Heaven to men; you yourselves have not entered, and you prevent others from entering!



“Woe to you, because you give a tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, but you have neglected what is most important in the Law: judgment [i.e., justice], mercy, and faith. You ought to have done this, and not neglected the other! You blind guides, who strain out a gnat, but swallow a camel [i.e., you pay attention to trivial things while neglecting what is important]!”

“Woe to you, for you become like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness! So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those sent to you! How many times I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers its chicks under its wings, and you did not wish it! Behold, your house is left empty for you. For I tell you, you will not see Me henceforth until you cry out, ‘Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Thus Christ called the Pharisees to repentance for the final time. Instead of remorse, however, they were filled with malice and hatred. Seeing their remorselessness He left the inner courtyard of the temple and sat by the treasury (a cup for collecting donations). Many rich men approached and made large donations. A poor widow also approached the cup and into it placed two mites (a few kopecks). The omniscient Lord, looking not at the outward insignificance of the gift, but at the disposition of her heart, said:

“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has given more than anyone else, for they gave gifts to God of their excess, while she has given of her poverty all that she had, her entire living.”

According to Saint John Chrysostom, “the Kingdom [cannot] be bought with money; it is not by money, but by purpose of mind which is exhibited by the money. Therefore, will one answer, there is no need of money? There is no need of money, but of the disposition; if you have this, you will be able even by two mites to purchase Heaven; where this is not, not even ten thousand talents of gold will be able to do that which the two mites could” (*Explanation of the Epistle to the Philippians*, 15:3).

## THE LORD FORETELLS THE FATE OF THE WORLD

(Mt. 24:1–51, Mk. 13:1–37, Lk. 21:5–38)

Upon leaving the Temple the disciples said to the Savior, “Look at this building and the stones!”

“Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left upon another here; all will be destroyed!” Christ answered.





When the Lord was sitting with His disciples on the slope of the Mount of Olives they began asking Him about the signs of the destruction of the temple and the end of the world.

He replied, "Take care that no one deceive you. For many will come under My name, and will say, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of great wars and rumors of wars, but do not be afraid, for all this must occur. But this is not yet the end. Nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be hunger, plague, and earthquakes in various places. All this is the beginning of the labor contractions of the universe. Christians will be persecuted and hated by all nations. Many will be led astray and will betray one another. Due to increasing iniquity, love in many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

"And the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations. And then the end will come. When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

"Then there will be great suffering, such as there has not been since the beginning of the world. False Christs and false prophets will arise then, in order to deceive even the chosen if possible. If they tell you, 'Look, He is in the desert,' do not believe it! For as the lightning comes from the east and shines all the way to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Suddenly after the suffering of those days the sun will grow dark, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from heaven, and the hosts of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of Christ [the Cross] will appear, and seeing it all the tribes of the earth will weep. The Lord will come with all the Angels upon the clouds of heaven. Angels with trumpets will assemble the chosen from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. And no one knows that day and hour but God the Father.

“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the Lord will come. If the master of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have kept watch and would not have permitted his house to be broken into. So do you also be ready to meet the Son of Man, Who will come when you do not think and do not expect.”

### THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (Mt. 25:1–13)

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Warning of the necessity to always be ready to meet the Lord, Christ told His disciples yet another parable:

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like ten maidens who, according to the Eastern custom, went out to meet the Bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five of them were wise. The foolish maidens took only lamps, while the wise ones took with them vessels of oil along with their lanterns. But the Bridegroom was slow in coming, and they all fell asleep. Suddenly at midnight a cry rang out: ‘The Bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet Him!’

“Then all the maidens arose and tended their lamps. The foolish maidens began asking the wise ones to share their oil with them, since their lamps were going out. The latter replied, ‘Then there will not be enough either for you or for us. You had better go to the merchants and buy your own.’

“While they were doing this the Bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with Him to the wedding feast. The doors were shut. Later the foolish virgins came and cried, ‘Lord, Lord, open the door to us!’ But He answered them, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you!’

“Watch therefore, for you do not know when Christ will return.”

The meaning of the parable is clear: the *virgins* are Christians who await the Second Coming of Christ. The *oil* is the grace of the Holy Spirit, obtained by means of good works, particularly through almsgiving. The *delayed coming of the Bridegroom* is the time between His First and Second Comings. The *sleep* of the maidens is death. Christ comes at *midnight*, i.e., during the triumph of the darkness of the Antichrist, when Christians have lost all earthly hope. The *lamps* are the radiance of righteousness.

Thus, after death one can no longer correct oneself, nor can one acquire the gifts of the Spirit, just as at midnight there is no place to buy oil from the merchants. And he who has not made the effort to acquire the fruits of righteousness while yet on earth risks finding himself outside the doors of heaven.

## CHRIST IN BETHANY (Mt. 26:1–16, Mk. 14:1–11)

When the Lord was in Bethany He said that the Passover was in two days, and that He would be betrayed to be crucified. At that time the high priest Caiaphas held a meeting at which it was decided to arrest and kill Jesus by deceit, but not on the feast, to avoid a public outcry.

On that day, which was a Wednesday, the Lord was in the house of Simon the leper. He was approached by a woman carrying a vessel of myrrh, who poured it out upon His head. Once again the disciples began to say that it would have been better to give the money from the sale of the myrrh to the poor.

To this Christ said, “You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me. She has poured out the myrrh upon My Body, preparing Me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this Gospel is preached in all the world, what she has done will be told.”



Then Judas Iscariot went to the high priests and said, “What will you give me if I betray Him?”

They decided to give him thirty pieces of silver (about a hundred twenty dinarii—the price of an escaped slave). And he promised to find a convenient opportunity to betray Christ. In remembrance of this evil act Christians fast every Wednesday.

## THE MYSTICAL SUPPER

(Mt. 26:17–29, Mk. 14:12–25, Lk. 22:7–20, Jn. 13–17)

The day of the Passover arrived, and Christ sent his apostles Peter and John to prepare the Passover lamb. As the Lord had told them they met a man carrying a pitcher of water, who provided them with a large, furnished upper room for the supper. There they prepared all that was required.

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When the evening of the 14th of Nisan arrived, Jesus Christ came with His twelve disciples to the chamber and said to them, *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God* (which was to come after Christ’s Resurrection from the dead; Lk. 22:15–16).

Before beginning the Passover meal those assembled had to wash their feet, but the disciples, as Tradition relates, did not wish to serve each other, and instead began to argue over which of them was the greatest. Then the Lord Himself arose, took off His outer garment, girded Himself with a towel, and began to wash the feet of the disciples.

When He approached Peter, the latter exclaimed, “Lord, are You washing my feet?”

“You do not know [what I am doing] now, but you will understand later,” Jesus said.

“You shall never wash my feet!” Peter exclaimed.

“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

“Then not only my feet, but my hands and my head!” Simon exclaimed.

“He who is washed need only wash his feet, for he is entirely clean, and you are clean, but not all,” Christ replied, indicating that He knew the traitor, but that the apostles had been cleansed by His word.

After this, putting on His usual clothing, the Lord said that by this action He had given an example of humility to all His followers, who must serve one another.

During the Passover meal Christ took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and said:





“Take it and divide it among you, for I tell you that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.”

Taking bread and giving thanks to the Father, the Lord Jesus broke it and gave it to the apostles, saying:

“This is My Body, which is given for you for the remission of sins. Do this in remembrance of Me.”

He likewise blessed the cup after the supper, saying:

“Drink of it, all of you; this is My Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many unto the remission of sins.”

Thus Christ established the New Covenant between God and men in His Blood. Even before Judas’ betrayal He offers Himself in Sacrifice to God, so that those who partake of His Gifts might have Eternal life. This sacred Supper, through which we are able to commune with the Savior, is performed in all churches to this day. As the disciples were eating, the Lord became troubled in spirit and said, “One of you will betray Me. His hand is with Me at the table. I go as the Father has determined for Me, but it would have been better for the betrayer to have never been born.”

The disciples began asking who it was. To this Christ answered, “The one to whom I give bread is he.”

Then, dipping bread in a dish, the Lord gave it to Judas Iscariot. This was the final call to the traitor to repent. But instead Judas became hardened, and along with the bread Satan entered into him.

Seeing that he was beyond correction, Christ said, “That which you wish to do, do quickly!”

And Judas went out into the night, which was a symbol of the darkness of hades that the traitor had prepared for himself.

When the servant of darkness had left the sacred assembly, Christ exclaimed, *Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in Him* (Jn. 13:31).

The Lord gave His disciples a new commandment: to love one another as He loved us. This is the sign by which Christians should be known. Those who believe in Christ will be able to do all His works, that through this the Father may be glorified. But in order for this to be possible, as a sign of love one must keep the commandments. Christ will send from the Father another Comforter—the Spirit of Truth, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He will be with us always, and will teach us all the words of the Lord, and will condemn the world for its sin. But Christ Himself also will not leave us orphans, but will return again, having prepared a place for us that we may be with Him forever. And we are joined to Him as branches are joined to a grape vine. But we are required to bear fruit. Otherwise the Father will cut us off and cast us into the fire. Christ calls the disciples not servants, but friends who know the will of God. We must not be surprised if the world hates us, for Christ chose us out of the world. The world treated Him in the same way. In the world we will have troubles, but Christ encouraged us, telling us: *Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world* (Jn. 16:33).

After this He addressed the Father in prayer as high priest, asking that He be glorified with the glory that He had before the world existed. Christ asked for His disciples and for those who would be converted by their words that they all be preserved by the name of God, that they be one in God, and



that they be preserved from evil and have the fullness of joy. The Lord asked that Christians be where He is, that they always be with Him and always behold His glory.

## THE PRAYER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

(Mt. 26:30–46, Mk. 14:32–42, Lk. 22:39–46)

After these words the Lord and His disciples sang psalms, then left the upper room on Zion and ascended the Mount of Olives. Then the Lord said to the disciples:

“All of you will be scandalized by Me this night, for it is written: I shall smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall scatter (Zech. 13:7). But after My Resurrection I will go before you into Galilee.”

“Even if everyone is scandalized by You, I will never be scandalized!” Peter exclaimed.

“Truly, truly I tell you,” Christ replied, “this night, before the cock crows, you will deny Me thrice.”

Crossing the winter torrent Cedron, Jesus entered the garden of Gethsemane (“olive press”), so that just as man had fallen in a garden, so also in a garden his salvation might begin. There Christ was seized by deathly terror, for He, the only one Who need not have died, being sinless, was going to the sufferings of death. The desire to live, which God placed in every living thing, is even stronger in Christ’s human nature, since His nature is not compromised by sin. Death was the more terrible for the Lord because He was to drink to the dregs the cup of God’s wrath, which was intended for us. He, being innocent, died for the guilty, and took upon Himself our curse, that we might be blessed. Small wonder that Christ as a man was afraid.

To the disciples He said, “Sit here while I pray.”

And taking with Him His three closest apostles—Peter, James, and John, who were with Him on Tabor—Christ began to sorrow and to be in anguish.

“My soul is deathly troubled,” He said to them. “Remain here and keep watch with Me.”

And going a little ways off He fell face down and prayed: *Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt* (Mk. 14:36).

Upon returning He found His disciples asleep.

“Simon, are you sleeping?” He asked Peter. “Could you not keep watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”



And again He went away and prayed: “Father, oh, if only You would will that this cup might pass Me by! But let not My will be done, but Yours!”

An angel appeared to Him from heaven and strengthened Him. And in agony Jesus prayed still more fervently, and from the strain His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Meanwhile His disciples had again fallen asleep.

Then <sup>1</sup>Jesus prayed a third time: “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass by Me that I might not drink it, let Thy will be done.”

Thus His human will overcame the terror of death and proved obedient to the will of God to the end. This is why Christians do not fear death, for the Savior took all the terror of it upon Himself.

Again He came to the disciples and said, *Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.* (Mk. 14:41–42).

## THE BETRAYAL (Mt. 26:47–57, Mk. 14:43–50, Lk. 22:47–53, Jn. 18:3–11)

While the Lord was still speaking, in the garden there appeared the glimmer of torches carried by a detachment of Jewish soldiers, with Judas at their head. He had promised to point out Christ by kissing Him. Entering the garden, Judas approached Jesus and kissed Him.

“Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” the Lord asked. “But never mind; do what you have come to do.”

After this He went out to meet the detachment and said, “Whom are you seeking?”

“Jesus of Nazareth.”

Then He replied, “I am He.”

Then the soldiers felt the Divine power and fell to the ground.

Christ approached them and again asked, “Whom are you seeking? If Me, then let the disciples be.”

Then the soldiers arrested the Lord. Peter attempted to defend Him, and with his sword he cut off the ear of one of the soldiers, named Malchus. But the Lord forbade him: “Sheathe your sword, for everyone who takes the sword will die by the sword. Do you really think I cannot now pray to the Father and that He will not send Me more than twelve legions [seventy-two thousand—*Auth.*] of angels? But then how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?”

And immediately the Lord healed Malchus. Then all the disciples deserted Him and fled. One of the disciples, Mark, followed after Christ. The soldiers attempted to arrest him, but he threw off the blanket in which he had been wrapped and escaped.

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## THE TRIAL BY THE HIGH PRIESTS

(Mt. 26:57–68, Mk. 14:53–65, Lk. 22:54, Jn. 18:12–25)

The soldiers led Christ bound to the former high priest Annas, who was the actual ruler of the Sanhedrin at the time. Annas asked the Lord about His disciples and His teaching. But Christ answered:

“I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, and said nothing secretly. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who heard.”

Then one of the servants struck Him on the cheek, saying, “Is that how You answer the high priest?”

The Lord said, *If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?* (Jn. 18:23).



Then Christ was led to Caiaphus the high priest, where the entire Sanhedrin (the supreme court) was already assembled. All the “judges” attempted to find false witnesses in order to condemn Christ to death, but they could find none, because no matter how many false witnesses came their testimony was always contradictory.

Finally two false witnesses came who said, “He said, ‘I can destroy the Temple of God and build it in three days.’”

But even this statement was insufficient, since the testimony again proved contradictory.

Rising from the high priestly seat of honor, Caiaphas asked, “Why do You make no answer?” But Jesus was silent.

Then the high priest said, “I charge You by the living God, tell us: are You the Christ, the Son of God?”

Jesus said, *Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven* (Mt. 26:64).

Then in anger the high priest tore his outer clothing, depriving himself of the priesthood in God’s eyes, and exclaimed, “He blasphemes! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have heard His blasphemy!”

Then all cried out, “He is guilty of death!”

And they began to spit in Christ’s face, backhanding him with their fists on the cheeks while covering His face with a garment. And tossing Him from one to another as they beat Him, they asked, “Prophecy to us, Christ, who is it that hit You?”

At sunrise on Friday the Sanhedrin assembled again, and they asked the Lord a second time whether He was the Messiah.

He answered them, *If I tell you, ye will not believe: And if I also ask you, ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God* (Lk. 22:67–69).

Then they asked Him again, “So You are the Son of God?”

He replied, “You yourselves are the witnesses of what I am.”

They said, “We have no more need of witnesses, for you have heard it yourselves from His lips.”

And they rose and led Him away to Pilate, the Roman governor.

## PETER’S DENIAL

(Mt. 26:69–75; Mk. 14:66–72; Lk. 22:55–62; Jn. 18:15–18, 25–27)

**T**he night was a cold one, and the servants kindled a bonfire to warm themselves. Peter also drew closer to the fire, to see the end of the trial.

A servant girl approached him and asked, “Were you not also with Jesus of Galilee?”

But he denied it: “I neither know nor understand what you are saying!” And he went into the front courtyard.

Then the servant girl and others began to say to him, “You also are one of His disciples!”





“No, not I!” Peter replied.

A little while later the servants began interrogating Peter more insistently: “You must be one of them; even your Galilean accent gives you away.”

A relative of Malchus also said, “Did I not see you with Him in the garden?”



Then in fear Peter began to curse and to swear by God that he did not know the person of whom they were speaking. And immediately the cock crowed. At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and he remembered Christ's words: "This night, before the cock crows, you will deny three times that you know Me."

And Peter went out and wept bitterly. Tradition tells us that though Christ forgave him after His Resurrection, each night when the rooster crowed Peter would rise and weep over his denial. This constant weeping left inflamed streaks upon his cheeks. Thus the Lord gave the pastor of the Church to understand human infirmity firsthand, that he might not be overly severe with sinners.

## THE END OF JUDAS (Mt. 27:3–10, Acts 1:16–20)

When Judas saw that the Lord was condemned to death, he repented and came to the high priests, saying, "I have sinned by betraying the innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

Then Judas threw down the money in the Temple and went and hanged himself. Tradition relates that the rope did not hold him: he came crashing down, and his innards spilled out.

The priests took the money and deliberated among themselves what to do with it. "We cannot accept it," they said, "because it is the price of blood."

Then they decided to buy a potter's field with it, in which to bury strangers. And it was called "The Field of Blood." Thus was fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Zechariah (Zech. 11:12–13), who had foretold that Israel would sell its God for thirty pieces of silver.

## THE JUDGMENT OF PILATE

(Mt. 27:11–26, Mk. 15:2–15, Lk. 23:3–25, Jn. 18:29–19:11)

Early in the morning on Friday the members of the Sanhedrin led Christ to Pontius Pilate to have His sentence confirmed. Pilate was then the Roman ruler of Judea. He went out to meet them and asked what their accusations were against this man. They attempted to force the ruler to simply ratify the sentence, but Pilate refused.

He went into the pretorium and asked the Lord, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Christ answered, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world My servants would fight for Me to keep Me from being delivered to the Jews, but now My Kingdom is not from here."

"You are a King then?" asked Pilate.

*To this end was I born, Christ replied, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice (Jn. 18:37).*

"What is truth?" Pilate skeptically inquired, and going out he declared to the priests that he found no guilt in Christ.

But they yelled that the Lord had been creating disturbances among the people, beginning with Galilee.

Then Pilate sent Him to the king of Gallilee, Herod, the same who had killed John the Forerunner. Herod wished to see Christ work a miracle, but He kept silent. Then Herod mocked Him, dressed him in shining white clothing, and sent Him back to Pilate. From that day on Herod and Pilate became friends, whereas previously they had been enemies.

When Christ was again brought to the ruler, Pilate said to the priests, "You have brought this man to me as an insurrectionist. Behold, I have examined Him here in your presence and have found no fault in Him, nor has Herod. Hence, I will punish Him and let Him go.

But the people began to yell for him to release one of the criminals in honor of the feast. Then Pilate placed before them Christ and also Barabbas, who during an insurrection had committed murder. But the people demanded that he release not Christ, but the murderer.

Then Pilate asked in bewilderment, "What then am I to do with Jesus, Who is called Christ?"

"Let Him be crucified!"

Then Pilate commanded that the Lord Jesus be whipped. The soldiers tied Him to a pillar and began to beat Him with a whip weighted with pieces of lead. To this day many who touch this pillar (which stands in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem) hear the whistle of the whip and the roar of the crowd.

Then, assembling the entire regiment, they began to mock Christ. The soldiers plaited a crown of thorns and put it on His head, dressed Him in purple, gave him a reed staff in place of a scepter, and fell on their knees before Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

And they hit Him on the cheeks, and beat the Lord on the head with the reed. Thus the Son of God took upon Himself our punishment. He is the true King, Who took upon Himself the crown of sufferings. The earth, cursed to bring forth thorns, was delivered of the curse when the barbs



of the crown of thorns pierced the head of the God-man. Our nakedness was covered by the purple robe of Christ. With the reed which was given Him in place of a scepter the Lord signed our release from sin. The Lord's blood washed away our iniquity. Thus was Adam of old cleansed by the New Adam.

Pilate led out the wounded Christ and said to the crowd, "Behold the man!"

And he was correct: before him stood a true man, the prototype of man, man as God had intended Him to be. The evil of the world came crashing down upon Him in a wave, but it could not corrupt the purity of Christ. Thus God showed that He is not the cause of sin and iniquity, which are foreign to our nature.

The people, however, cried out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

"Am I to crucify your king?!" the ruler exclaimed.

"We have no king but Caesar," yelled the high priests.

Then Pilate washed his hands before the people and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man!"

"May his blood be upon us and upon our children!" cried all the people.

Then Pilate ordered that the Innocent Lord be crucified. God had looked upon all the judgments of men and had found no justice in them.

Tradition says that later Pilate was exiled to Vienne for his lawless acts, where in despair he took his own life.

## THE CRUCIFIXION

(Mt. 27:32–50, Mk. 15:21–41, Lk. 23:32–49, Jn. 19:17–37)

The Cross was placed upon Christ's shoulders and He was led through the streets of Jerusalem. Thus was the ancient prophecy fulfilled, which said that His government is upon His shoulders—*the government shall be upon His shoulder* (Is. 9:6). The true King went to die for His people.

But the Lord had been so badly hurt that He could not carry the Cross, falling several times under its weight. Then the soldiers forced a certain Simon of Cyrene to carry the Lord's Cross.

Several women mourned and sobbed for Christ. But He turned to them and said, "O daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but for yourselves and your children. For the days will come when people will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that have not given birth, and the breasts that have not nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall upon us,' and to





the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if a green tree is treated thus, what will be done to the dead tree?”

And they led Him to the mount of Golgotha (the Hill of the Skull), where the first man, Adam, was buried. There the Most-pure Body of the Lord was transfigured to the Cross with nails. As sin began with the tree of disobedience, so our Redemption began with the Cross—the tree of obedience. The Lord was raised into the air to die, that He might lay low the aerial tyrant, the devil. His hands were pierced to heal the lawless stirring of our first-parents’ hands. His feet were nailed in place to keep our own feet from running down the path of sin. His Most-pure Blood was spilled to redeem us from God’s righteous judgment. And Christ’s outstretched hands gathered divided mankind together into the Father’s embrace.

Before His execution Christ was given a mixture of wine and hyssop to drink, which has a narcotic effect. The wine was so sour that it had turned to vinegar, and the hyssop was as bitter as gall (bile). When He had tasted it He refused to drink it. This was the Hebrews’ gratitude for the sweet manna and the bread with which Christ had fed them.

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Above His head a sign was nailed, written in three languages—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Thus Pilate proclaimed the Kingdom of Jesus which began at the Cross.

When He was being crucified between two thieves He prayed for His executioners: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* (Lk. 23:34).

The high priests walked past the Crucified Lord and blasphemed Him, shaking their heads and saying, “Hey you, you who destroy the temple and build in again after three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the Cross and we will believe in you! He trusted in God, so let God save him if he pleases Him!”

The soldiers guarding those crucified divided their clothing among themselves, tearing Christ’s cloak into pieces. But for His vesture (a seamless robe worn against the skin) they cast lots.

The thieves who were crucified to the right and the left of Him also reviled Him. Suddenly, at the sixth hour of the day (noon) darkness fell, lasting until the ninth hour (three o’clock in the afternoon). The sun went dark, not wishing to look upon the Death of God.

One of the evildoers hanging there continued to malign Him, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself then, and us too!”

But the other thief came to his senses and restrained the first: “Do you not know that we have received our just deserts for our deeds? But He has committed no evil!”

And turning to Jesus Christ he said, “Remember me, Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom!”

“Today you shall be with Me in Paradise,” Jesus answered him.



Thus on the Cross we were given the hope that everyone who repents, even at the point of death, will receive forgiveness from the Lord.

At the Cross stood the Theotokos and the apostle John, as well as the women who served Him: Mary Magdalene, and Mary the wife of Cleopas. Indicating John, Christ said to His Mother, "Woman, this is your son."

Then to the disciple He said, "Behold your Mother."

From that hour on, the Lord's beloved disciple took Her to live with him. Thus on Golgotha, in the person of the apostle John, Christ made all Christians the children of His Mother.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon Christ's sufferings reached their peak. He felt the full weight of the curse and the godforsakenness that



weighed upon mankind. Being the true Mediator for men, He cried out to the Heavenly Father in terrible anguish, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* (My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?—Mk. 15:34).

Several of those standing nearby continued to mock Him: “He is calling for Eiljah the prophet!”

Then the Lord said, “I thirst!”

One of the soldiers took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and spearing it with a reed gave it to Him to drink.

Others cried, “Leave Him alone; let us wait and see whether Elijah will come to save Him!”

Then Jesus exclaimed, *It is finished!* (Jn. 19:30).

The ransom had been paid. The Son of God had given His life for us—Flesh for flesh, Blood for blood, Soul for soul. The punishment of the world had been washed away by the sufferings of the God-man. The great High Priest had offered Himself in Sacrifice and obtained eternal Redemption.

The Lord’s last words were words of complete trust in the Father: *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit* (Lk. 23:46).

And with these words He died, and His soul left His Body, to descend triumphantly into hades.

At the moment of His death there was an earthquake, the marks of which are visible in Jerusalem to this day. Cliffs split, tombs opened, and the Blood of Christ washed over the skull of Adam, washing away his crime. Many of the saints who had died came to life, to enter Jerusalem after His Resurrection and proclaim to many the miracle of salvation. The curtain (which was several centimeters thick) separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn in half from top to bottom, baring the secrets it concealed. Thus the Holy Spirit declared that the Old Testament had reached its end. From henceforth the depths of the Divine Life had become accessible to all men who were washed with the Blood of Jesus.

Seeing what had happened, the commander of the guard, a centurion named Longinus, exclaimed, “This man was a righteous man and the Son of God!” According to Tradition he later accepted Christianity and became a martyr.

In the meantime the Jews, who did not wish for those executed to be left hanging on the crosses on the Sabbath feast, asked Pilate to dispatch them. Then the soldiers came and broke the shins of the two robbers. Seeing that Christ was already dead, they did not bother breaking His shins. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out. Thus from the side of Christ, the New Adam, now asleep in the sleep of death, was born the New Eve, the Church, setting right the crime of our first mother. This Church is born in the water of baptism and nourished with the Blood of Communion.

## THE BURIAL (Mt. 27:57–66, Mk. 15:42–7, Lk. 23:50–56, Jn. 19:38–42)

After the Lord surrendered His spirit to the Father, two of His secret disciples—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, members of the Sanhedrin—were filled with courage and decided to fulfill the final duty of love for their deceased Teacher. Joseph went to Pilate and asked for the Body of Jesus Christ. Upon learning that Christ had died the ruler was surprised, but when the commander of the guard confirmed the death of the Executed One he commanded that the Body be given him.

Then Joseph took the Lord down from the Cross and carried Him to his own tomb in a garden next to Golgotha. Nicodemus brought with him about a hundred liters of myrrh and aloë. They wrapped the Lord's Body in a shroud, sprinkled it with sweet spices, and buried it in a new tomb where no one had ever been buried, so that no one would say that someone other than Christ had risen. Thus was the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled: *And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth* (Is. 53:9).

At the entrance to the burial cave an enormous stone was placed, sealing in the Rock of Life. The women who had walked with Christ since Galilee saw where He was laid, so that later after the Sabbath rest they might complete the rite of burial by anointing the Lord's Body with myrrh.

When the Body of the Lord was placed in the bowels of the earth, the earth was delivered from the ancient curse placed upon it at the time of the



fall into sin. The Lord's tomb could not keep in the Source of Life, and it became the site of the beginning of the General Resurrection.

On the Sabbath in accordance with the Law the disciples of the Lord took their rest, which was wet through with tears. In the meantime the high priests and Pharisees recalled that the Lord had foretold His Resurrection on the third day. In order to prevent this miracle they went to Pilate and asked his permission to set a guard at the sepulcher, so that the disciples would not steal the Body and say that He had risen from the dead.

Pilate replied, "You have a watch [the Roman guard appointed during the feast to protect the Temple—*Auth.*]. Take it and do as you think best."

Then they took the soldiers and set a watch at the Tomb. The stone they sealed with their own seal, so that nothing would change in the decision regarding Jesus. As Daniel was once sealed in the lion's den, so the Jews hoped to keep the Lord in the kingdom of death. But God willed otherwise.

## THE DESCENT INTO HADES

While Christ's Body was resting in the sepulcher, not subject to corruption, His Soul descended into the subterranean abyss. There Lucifer awaited it, hoping to seize power for all time over Him Who had been delivering men from his power. What actually occurred was not at all what the enemy had expected. In the endless night of hades, where no ray of light had yet been seen, Christ manifested His Divine radiance. The gates that had opened in but one direction crumbled before the might of the Creator. And above their ruins the victorious standards of the Eternal King shone brightly. The angels, contemplating His power in reverent terror, brought the tempter to Him and threw him down at His feet. Then the Lord passed His judgment over him.

"You had power over sinners; such was your right. But how dare you lay your hands on Me, Who am sinless?" Christ asked. "Therefore you, O tyrant, are deprived even of those whom you formerly had by right."

Thus the tormenter was plundered. Christ preached deliverance to the dead. To Him the prophets came running, and with them the patriarchs, the righteous Jews, and those who had rejected the idols of the pagans. Those who had sought God on earth and who heard Him after death entered Paradise together with the Lord. And in the deepest part of the abyss the Son of God found the first people, created by His own hands, who had fled from Him to the very belly of hades. These too the Lord restored from corruption, saying, "For your sake I, the Creator, have become your Son, to restore you to the Heavenly Father. Arise, let us leave this place!"

And together with the Crucified One a multitude of the ancients returned to Paradise lost to await the General Resurrection. But the first to return to the homeland of all mankind was not Adam or Moses, but the thief, of whom the Church sings, “The repentance of the thief won paradise.”

## THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST THE SAVIOR

During the night of Saturday into Sunday by the power of His Divinity our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. His most-pure Soul was united with His Body for all time, tearing open the belly of death.

Though Christ’s Body in its essence remained the same as it had been on Golgotha, it was changed in its manner of existence. It became independent of the laws of the fallen world. Christ passed through walls and closed doors.





He was outside the power of the laws of gravity. He did not have to eat. His Body was no longer subject to suffering and death.

The Lord Jesus resurrected invisibly not only for men, but also for the angels. This great mystery of the transfiguration of man's essence will remain unknowable until the day of the Second Coming of Christ. When the Lord Jesus destroyed and trampled death, neither the celestial spirits nor the guards keeping watch over the sepulcher were aware of it.

Jesus Christ resurrected late at night on the same day when He created the universe out of nonexistence. Invisible, He passed through the shroud (leaving on it the traces of His Arising) and the stone and departed. From that moment on the guards were unwittingly guarding an empty Tomb. But an angel from heaven quickly put an end to their ignorance.

From that paschal night onward begins a new era in the existence of the created universe. As Saint Maximus the Confessor wrote, he who is the most profoundly initiated into the mystery of the Resurrection will learn why God created the world.

The Risen Jesus is the Firstfruit, the first Sheaf of the harvest of the resurrected. He is the Firstborn of the dead. As death came into the world through a man, so life came through the death of a Man and His Resurrection from the dead. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all are enlivened.

The wall of death was broken by the risen Lord Jesus, and on the other side of it Christians find the eternal life of God Himself. People become gods by the power of the Risen One. Thus was fulfilled the plan of the Creator, Who before time began conceived the intent of uniting all rational beings beneath a Head, which is Christ.

## THE MYRRH-BEARING WOMEN AT THE TOMB

(Mt. 28:1–10, Mk. 16:1–11, Lk. 24:1–10, Jn. 20:1–18)

Late in the evening of the Sabbath Mary Magdalene and the Theotokos came to the Tomb, and after this went to buy myrrh. When midnight of Sunday began, in the place where the now-empty Tomb of Christ stood a great earthquake occurred: an angel of God, clothed in shining white garments, descended from heaven's heights. He tore off the priests' seal, rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. At the angel's appearance, which was like lightning, the guards trembled with fear. In terror they fainted away, and afterward fled. Upon reaching Jerusalem they reported to the high priests what had happened. But the latter bribed them to say that while they were sleeping the disciples had stolen the Body of Christ.





The first to come to the Tomb was Mary Magdalene. It was she who saw that the stone had been rolled away. Immediately she ran to the apostles Peter and John. They quickly ran to the Tomb, and looking into the vault, which was filled with an unearthly light, they found the winding sheet that the Risen One had deserted, lying there like an empty cocoon. Then the apostle John became convinced of His Resurrection, because no thief would ever tear off the winding sheet, which had been stuck fast to the body.

They went back to their home, while Mary Magdalene remained at the Tomb, weeping. Bending down to look into the vault, she saw two angels sitting at the head and the foot of the burial couch.

“Woman, why are you crying?” they asked her. “Whom do you seek?”

“They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him,” Mary replied.

At that moment the celestial messengers rose, seeing Christ approaching. Magdalene turned, and seeing the Lord she thought Him to be the gardener.

“Lord, if you have taken the Body, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away,” Mary requested.

And then she heard her name, spoken by that beloved voice. The shepherd called His sheep by name, and she immediately came running to Him, crying, *Rabbi!* (Teacher!)

*Do not touch Me, Christ said, for I have not yet ascended to My Father.* (Your attitude toward Me is human, but true unity will occur only at the

Throne of God.) *Go now to My brethren and tell them: I ascend to My Father (by nature) and your Father (by adoption), and to My God (by His human nature) and your God (as Creator; Jn. 20:17).*

Magdalene went to the apostles and told them everything, but they did not believe her. Then she went to the Tomb again. At the same time Joanna, Mary—the mother of James and Salome—and several others (Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary, Susanna, and Veronica) also arrived at the tomb. As they went to the Tomb they wondered who would roll away the stone for them from the doors of the vault. But upon arriving they found the stone rolled away, and two angels proclaimed to them the Resurrection. But the apostles did not believe their testimony either.

At dawn Mary Magdalene came with the Theotokos to the Tomb, where they found the angel sitting on the stone by the Tomb.

The angel said to the women, *Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you (Mt. 28:5–7).*

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They hurriedly left the sepulcher and ran to the disciples. Along the way the Risen Lord Himself met them, and said, “Hail!”

They bowed down before Him, tightly clasping His pierced feet.

Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go into Galilee.”

Thus it was that women, who had been the first to be punished, were the first to be vouchsafed the joy of salvation. But even now the apostles did not believe.

## THE MEETING ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

(Lk. 24:13–35, Mk. 16:12–13)

**I**n the evening of the day of the Resurrection Luke and Cleopas were walking to the village of Emmaus, discussing what had happened in Jerusalem. Along the way the risen Jesus joined them. But His appearance was changed, and the eyes of the disciples were restrained, so that they did not recognize Christ.

“What are you talking about, and why are you sad?” Jesus asked.

“Are you really the only pilgrim to Jerusalem who does not know what has occurred there in the last few few days?” asked Cleopas.

“What things?”

“What happened to Jesus of Nazareth, a Man strong in deed and word

before God and all the people. He was given over to death to the high priests and the rulers, but we had thought He was the Deliverer of Israel. But three days have passed since then. Today, however, several of our women amazed us. They did not find His Body in the Tomb, and they say they saw angels who said He was alive.”

*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken,* Christ replied. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?* (Lk. 24:25–26).

Then He explained to them the meaning of the prophecies of the Old Testament that had come to pass in Him. The travelers reached Emmaus, and the disciples convinced Jesus to have supper with them. While they were eating Christ took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, thereby performing the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Then they recognized Jesus, but He became invisible to them, showing that He must now be sought in the Chalice of the Eucharist.

Then Luke and Cleopas recalled how they had felt their hearts burning along the road. This was the Spirit of Christ warming them. And immediately they ran to Jerusalem, where they found the apostles assembled, and told them that Christ had appeared to them along the way. The apostles for their part related that the Lord Jesus had appeared to Peter.

## THE APPEARANCE AT THE PASCHAL SUPPER

(Mk. 16:14–18, Lk. 24:36–45, Jn. 20:19–25)

**W**hile they were talking about what had happened to them, Jesus Himself passed through the locked doors, stood in their midst, and said, “Peace be unto you!”

They were troubled, thinking they were seeing a spirit. But the Lord said to them, “Why are you troubled? Look at My hands and feet. It is I Myself. Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones.”

When they still did not believe it, Christ ate broiled fish and honey in the comb before them, and said, “This is what I spoke of while I was still with you: that all that was written in the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms concerning Me had to be fulfilled.”

And He opened their minds to the understanding of the Scriptures, and breathing upon them (renewing the breath by which Adam was created) He said to the apostles a second time:

“Peace be unto you! As My Father has sent Me, so do I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit! Whomever you forgive, their sins will be forgiven, and upon whom you leave them they will remain.”



Then Christ commanded the apostles, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover* (Mk. 16:15–18).

## THE CONVINCING OF THOMAS (Jn. 20:24–31)

That evening Thomas was not there with the apostles. He did not believe them, and said, “Unless I see in His hands the wounds of the nails, and put my finger into the wounds, and put my hand into the wound in His side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later all eleven disciples (including Thomas) were together. And again Jesus entered through the locked doors, and said to Thomas, “Come here and look upon My hands, and reach out and put your hand into My side, and do not be faithless, but believing.”

Thomas exclaimed, *My Lord and my God!* (Jn. 20:28).

Christ answered, *Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed* (Jn. 20:29).

Thus the Lord showed His Resurrection to be genuine.

THE LORD IN GALILEE (Mt. 28:16–20, 1 Cor. 15:6).  
 CHRIST'S APPEARANCE ON THE SEA  
 OF TIBERIAS (Jn. 21)

As the Lord had commanded, His disciples returned from Jerusalem to Galilee, and came to a mountain to which the Lord had commanded them to go. With them were about five hundred people. Upon seeing Christ they worshiped Him, but some began to doubt. Then Jesus approached and said to the eleven apostles, *All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Mt. 28:18–20).

Thus Christ established the sacrament of holy baptism, which must be performed by the apostles and their successors. In the very performance of the sacrament our Lord revealed the great mystery of the intradivine Life. Baptism is performed in one Name, but three Persons are invoked. Thus Christ shows that the One God exists in three Hypostases.

To this day this great command of Christ has not been entirely fulfilled. There are many nations whom the news of the Risen Savior has not yet reached. Until it has been, heard the Lord's work on this fallen earth is not yet complete. The power of the Conqueror of death remains to this day with the Christians of the Apostolic Church. Jesus the Almighty is with us, and we fear nothing.

After the meeting with Christ the apostles returned to their usual work. Once Peter, James, John, Thomas, Nathaniel, and two other disciples went by night to fish in the Sea of Tiberias. All night they labored, but caught nothing. Then through the morning sea smoke they saw the Risen Jesus standing on the shore. But the disciples did not immediately recognize Him.

Jesus said to them, "Do you have any food?"

"No," they replied.

"Cast your nets on the right side of the boat and you will catch some," the Lord commanded.

They cast their nets, and could not even pull them back out due to the great number of fish.

"It is the Lord," John said to Peter, remembering the miracle by which the apostles were called.

Peter quickly girded himself and jumped into the sea, so as to reach the feet of Christ with all possible speed. The others came in the boat, because they were not far from shore (about 90 meters).

When they came ashore they saw a fire burning, on which were cooking fish and bread, created by Jesus' almighty power. At Christ's command Peter



drew in the net, in which there were a hundred fifty-three large fish—an image of the faithful of the gentiles (a hundred) and the Hebrews (fifty), who were enlightened by the Holy Trinity.

As true Master of creation Jesus said, “Come and breakfast.”

And He gave them the bread and fish. The disciples silently partook of God’s food, knowing that it was the Lord Himself before them.

So we also, when we labor in the night of the world, cannot create eternal food for ourselves until Christ comes to us and fills our nets with the gifts of grace. Then we are able to do great good works that are unbelievable for the unenlightened. But when the morning of the new universe dawns, and Jesus Himself meets each of us on the shore of His Kingdom, we will find that our reward is His pure gift, unmerited by us.

After breakfast Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me more than anyone?”

Simon answered, “Yes, Lord! You know that I am Your friend!”

Christ answered him, “Feed My sheep.

A little while later Jesus again asked him, “Simon, son of Jonas, do you love Me?”

“Yes, Lord! You know that I am your Friend!” Peter answered a second time.

“Feed My sheep,” Jesus commanded Him.

A third time the Lord said, “Simon, son of Jonas, are you My friend?”

And Peter, gazing into the flames, remembered another fire beside which he had denied Christ three times, and sorrowfully he exclaimed, “Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You!”

“Feed My sheep,” Jesus answered.

Thus Peter was restored to his apostleship, and to him together with the other apostles were entrusted the Christians of all the world.

After this the Lord said to Peter, “When you were young you girded yourself and went where you wished. But when you grow old you will reach out and another will lead you where you do not wish.”

Thus the Lord foretold the apostle’s martyric death by which he later glorified God. But the Lord encouraged him, commanding, “Follow Me!”

Simon followed Christ, but turning he saw John.

“Lord, what about him?” Peter asked, being a friend of John.

But the Lord, curbing his curiosity, spoke the mysterious words: *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me* (Jn. 21:22).

And it began to be rumored among the Christians that the apostle John would not die, though the Lord had not said this directly. But the repose of the apostle of love is indeed shrouded in mystery, and his grave is empty.



## THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST THE SAVIOR

(Mk. 16:19–20, Lk. 24:46–53, Acts 1)

For forty days the risen Lord appeared to His disciples, partaking of food with them. He taught them the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God, and revealed the meanings and symbols of the Old Testament. All the accepted explanations of Scripture in the Orthodox Church originate from these explanations of the Risen Jesus. Holy Tradition says that it was at this time that Christ baptized His disciples and ordained James bishop of Jerusalem, thereby establishing the entire structure of the Church.

At last, ten days before the feast of Pentecost, Christ appeared to the disciples in Jerusalem and said to them, “So it is written, and so Christ had to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins had to be preached in His name among all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses to this. Behold, I will send the promise of My Father upon you. Remain then in Jerusalem until you are clothed with Power from above. For John baptized with water, but a few days from now you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit.”

They approached Christ together and asked Him, “Is this not the time, Lord, when You will restore the kingdom to Israel?”

But He answered them, “It is not your affair to know the seasons and the times that the Father has set by His authority. But you shall receive Power when the Holy Spirit descends upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.”

Having said this, the Lord led them out of the city, to Bethany on the Mount of Olives, where He raised His hands and blessed them. And as He was blessing them He began to rise up from them, ascending into the sky, and a shining cloud of the glory of God took Him from their sight.

The Lord Jesus Christ passed through all the heavens, and before Him all the fiery spirits bowed down. He went out beyond the bounds of the created universe and entered the blazing depths of the Divinity. There as man He sat at the right hand of God the Father, in His humanity participating in ruling the world. In the heavens Christ continues to mediate before the Father for Christians, and as eternal High Priest He cleanses our sins and offers His Body and Blood in sacrifice upon our altars.

In the meantime the apostles stood looking up into the sky, gazing upon the Lord’s ascension. At that moment two Angels in white garments appeared and said, *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11).



Thus the angels foretold the Second Coming of Christ. After this the apostles returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were constantly in the Temple, glorifying and blessing God.

Once they were assembled in an upper room together with the Theotokos and others of the disciples, numbering about a hundred twenty persons. Then Peter said that they ought to choose a new apostle to replace Judas Iscariot, from among those who had always been with Christ from the baptism of John up until the Ascension, who had been witnesses to His Resurrection. Then they presented two men: Joseph Justus and Matthias. Having prayed they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, who was added to the number of the eleven apostles.

The feast of Ascension is one of the twelve great feasts. It is celebrated on the fortieth day after Pascha.



## Part VIII

# THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH



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### THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2)

Ten days after the Ascension, after the nine ranks of angels had worshiped the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled His promise: from the unoriginate depths of God the Father He sent down upon the apostles the Lord God the Holy Spirit, so that He might place into men's hearts the fruits of the priceless Sacrifice of Christ and grant them participation in the Divine life.

On that day the Jews were celebrating the great day of Pentecost, on which the appearance of God on Sinai was commemorated. At that time the first sheaves of the new harvest were brought. The twelve apostles were together in oneness of mind in an upper room on Sion. Suddenly (Tradition states it was at nine in the morning) a loud noise like a powerful whirlwind came from the heavens, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Above their heads flickered what appeared to be tongues of fire, so that a tongue of fire descended upon the head of each. The Holy Spirit which had appeared in the form of tongues showed His kinship with God the Word (for what is closer to the word than the tongue?). The Holy Spirit filled them, baptized them, restored their nature, and filled them to overflowing with Eternal life. The Spirit ordained the apostles and remained forever with them, with their successors, and with all whom they made communicants of Him through chrismation.

Thus God gave the new Law on Mount Sion, as He had foretold through the prophet Isaiah (Is. 2). The *upper room* was an image of Mount Sinai, the *whirlwind*—of the Spirit, and the *flame*—of the fire that burned up the mountain and destroyed the accumulation of sin. The *house* is the beginning of the





Church in which God abides, and the *tongue of fire* is a symbol of the preaching of Christ.

Immediately the apostles, moved by an unseen power, began to glorify the greatness of God in various foreign languages, as the Spirit moved them. A great many people came running to the upper room, drawn by the noise, and all were amazed, hearing Galileans distinctly and correctly speaking various languages, proclaiming the greatness of the Creator.

The unbelievers laughed at them, accusing them of drunkenness. But the apostle Peter said to the people, “We are not drunk, as you think. Rather, this is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, which promised that God would pour out from His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28). And this will occur before the coming of the last times. Jesus of Nazareth, Whose ministry God confirmed with wonders, you killed by the hands of lawless men, hanging Him on a tree. God raised Him from the dead, tearing apart the labor pangs of death, which could not hold Him. King David likewise foretold this, saying that His soul has not been left in hades, and His flesh has not seen corruption (Ps. 15). And we are witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus. He has ascended into the heavens and has poured out the promised Spirit, as you see. Know for certain therefore that God has made Lord and Anointed [i.e., Christ] this Jesus Whom you crucified.”

Many of those who heard were softened in heart and asked what they ought to do. To this Peter replied, *Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off [the pagans], even as many as the Lord our God shall call ... Save yourselves from this untoward generation* (Acts 2:38–40).

Hearing his words many were baptized.

On that day three thousand persons were joined to the newborn Church. Thus appeared on earth the Orthodox Church—the workshop where God makes children for Himself.

The day of Pentecost is one of the twelve great feasts, and is celebrated on the eighth Sunday after Pascha.

On this day we pray on our knees that the Holy Spirit be sent down upon us.

## THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit established the One Holy Catholic Church. The very word *Church* (in the Greek, *ecclesia*) means “assembly of those who are called.” From this we see that the Church’s source is not an



earthly one. It is God Who gathers His people unto Himself. The priests are God's messengers in this great work of restoring the original unity of the primeval world order. God first created the Church in Paradise, and later in the times of the patriarchs and the prophets. But divine communion in its fullness became possible only after the Sacrifice on Golgotha. From the Lord's Blood the Church of the New (and final) Testament is born.

Holy Scripture teaches us that the Church is not merely a social organization, but the mystical Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God is its Head, and we all are its members. This is not an allegory, but a reality. For all Christians, united by the common faith that has come to us from God the Father (and hence who share a common mind—that of Christ), who fulfill the Law of God (and hence share the single will of the Creator), and are subject to the apostolic succession of the episcopate, participate in the life of God through the Holy Mysteries.

Baptism gives a person birth into the life of God. He is clothed in Christ, and his sins are now forgiven. In chrismation the Holy Spirit places His seal upon him and gives him the strength for Eternal life. Finally, in Communion he achieves the pinnacle of all desires: he partakes of the Body and Blood of Christ, which transfigure him by a strange alteration. Thus, according to Symeon the New Theologian, we look upon our hands and see the hands of God.

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Indeed, the communicant becomes flesh of the God-man's flesh and bone of His bone. And thus all the faithful are united to Christ, and in Him to one another. Abba Dorotheus said that as in a wheel the spokes are closest to each other only at the center, so in the Church all are united around Christ, Who is bestowed upon us in Communion. And this is true not only of living Christians, but also of those who have died, trusting in Christ. Hence, it is not enough to simply believe in God. One must partake of the Holy Chalice and receive the life of God.

By sending His Spirit upon the apostles, and through them upon all men, Christ established the hierarchy through which the Spirit is poured out upon the people of God to this day. This hierarchy is headed by the bishops, the successors of the apostles, who possess full authority and are able to perform all the Sacraments. They are assisted by the presbyters (or priests), whom they appoint to perform all the services and all the sacraments, except for the ordination of new priests and the consecration of temples. Deacons assist both bishops and priests in performing the divine services, but they themselves cannot perform the sacraments.

But the Spirit bestowed upon His Church a countless multitude of gifts, including the gifts of prophecy, healing, comfort, and driving out evil spirits. These gifts may be possessed not only by priests, but by all Christians who have preserved the faith intact and who keep God's commandments.

But neither the hierarchy nor even the Church in her fullness has the authority to change the Revelation given her by the Creator. The Father keeps watch over her, the Son preserves her, and the Holy Spirit, Who guides the Church to this day, continues to do His will and leads each of her members to perfection. It is for this reason that the Church is infallible and cannot err. The devil has incited numerous false teachings and schisms in her, but all of them are laid low by the power of God. Those who are impious and arrogant fall away from the Church, but she herself, like Noah's ark, continues her path over the stormy sea of this world. To this day she preserves intact the Revelation that has been preserved just as intact throughout the ages. The Holy Spirit continues to raise up in her more and more saints and righteous ones, martyrs and missionaries, holy hierarchs and wonderworkers. In her more and more nations are subjected to the might of Christ, despite numerous apostasies and rebellions.

There is nothing like this outside the Church. "He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother ... he cannot attain unto the kingdom who forsakes [the Church] which shall reign there," writes Saint Cyprian of Carthage (*The Unity of the Church*). And such is indeed the case. The Spirit of God does not enliven those who have not entered into the saving walls of the Church, and their fate lies in the jaws of the dread monster, the devil, who will devour the souls of the disobedient.

## THE FIRST CHURCH IN JERUSALEM (Acts 3–5)

The newly-baptized disciples, communing daily of the Body and Blood of Christ and praying, remained continually in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Their love was so great that they did not wish to have anything of their own, but voluntarily sold their property, giving the money to the apostles. The apostles divided the money evenly among all, so that no one among them was left in need. Each day more and more people joined the Church. Once the apostles Peter and John went up into the Temple at three o'clock in the afternoon to pray. Near the gate of the Temple, called the Beautiful Gate, a lame man lay begging.

Looking at him intently, Peter said, "Silver and gold are something we never have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, arise and walk!" And seizing him by the hand he raised him up.

Immediately the power of God strengthened the lame man's legs, and he sprang up, and leaping about he ran into the Temple, glorifying God. A crowd gathered, and to those assembled the apostles preached Christ, Whom the

former had so recently renounced. About five thousand men received holy Baptism. But the infuriated priests arrested the apostles and dragged them into court. There the rulers of the people forbade them to preach Christ. But they answered, *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* (Acts 4:19–20).

The priests threatened them, then let them go, as they feared the people, who were astounded by the greatness of the miracle: the man who had been healed was already forty years old.

At that time, when many were bringing their property to the apostles, a certain Ananias and his wife Sapphira decided to put on an appearance of being as noble as the others. They sold their property, but brought the apostles only a part, claiming that it was everything.

Then Peter said, *Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? ... thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God* (Acts 5:3–4).

Immediately Ananias died, punished by God for his lie. Three hours later his wife also came, unaware of what had happened.

Peter asked, “Was it for such an amount that you sold your property?”

“Yes, for that amount,” she said.

“Why have you decided to tempt the Holy Spirit?” Peter asked. “Those who buried your husband are entering, and they will carry you out as well.”

And immediately Sapphira died. And the whole Church was horrified, seeing God’s severe punishment for sin.

All the Christians gathered in the Temple, in Solomon’s Porch, and a multitude of people brought those who were sick so that at least Peter’s shadow might touch them, and they were healed. Then the priests arrested the apostles a second time, but at night an angel set them free and sent them to preach the words of life. Then they were taken to court, where after fruitless attempts to force the apostles to be silent they were beaten, then released. They again went to preach, rejoicing at having been dishonored for the name of Christ.

## THE MURDER OF THE FIRST-MARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN (Acts 6–7)

**T**he first Church grew, and in it problems arose due to human failings: when the daily alms were distributed the widows of the Hebrews who lived outside the borders of Palestine were neglected in favor of the local inhabitants. In

order to prevent arbitrariness and put an end to injustice, through the Holy Spirit the apostles decided to choose seven men to see to the charitable work. The apostles themselves needed to put all their efforts toward preaching the Gospel.

The assembly of the Church chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The apostles laid their hands on them, bestowing upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit for service. Thus by God's will was established the ministry of the *deacons* (from the Greek, meaning, "ministers" or "servers"), who assist the apostles' successors both in charitable work and in conducting the divine services. To this day the deacons assist the bishops and the priests in fulfilling their ministry of preaching the Gospel.

One of the seven deacons, Stephen, was filled with wisdom and the supernatural powers of God. He worked numerous miracles among men and demonstrated to the Jews that Jesus is the True Messiah, the Christ, Whom the prophets promised. Certain zealots of the Law entered into a debate with Stephen, which they lost. In a fury they slandered the deacon, and raising an uproar they seized him and brought him to the supreme court (the Sanhedrin). There false witnesses testified against him, accusing Stephen of blaspheming the Temple and the Law. God glorified His witness, and all those assembled saw his face shining like that of an angel. Thus were Christ's words fulfilled, that the righteous will be like the angels (Mt. 22:30). Incidentally, for this same reason since the Lord's Redeeming Sacrifice we are able to depict not only angels, but also the saints.

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In his speech Stephen showed that his preaching was not contrary to the Law, nor was it blasphemy against the Temple. On the contrary, all the sacred history of the Old Testament leads to Christ, He being its fulfillment. But neither was the rejection of the Lord Jesus a new thing, for this was precisely how the Hebrews had acted throughout their entire history. So they had treated Joseph the Fair, and Moses, to whom God gave the Law, and the other prophets.

Stephen concluded with terrible words, such as one might have heard from the mouth of a prophet of old: *Ye stiffnecked* (i.e., unable to bow down) *and uncircumcised in heart and ears* (overgrown with sin), *ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it* (Acts 7:51–53).

These courageous words tore like a saw at the hearts of the malevolent fanatics. In an animal rage they gnashed their teeth at him. At that moment Stephen received support from the heavens. By the power of the Holy Spirit his spiritual eyes were opened, and he beheld the glory of God, and Jesus

Christ standing at the right hand of the Father. There He stood, fighting alongside His martyr.

Stephen cried out, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

This vision brought the judges’ satanic rage to the breaking point, and without trying the case they plugged their ears and rushed at him. They dragged Stephen outside the city gates, and there they stoned him.

The false witnesses laid their outer garments at the feet of a relative of Stephen—Saul, who approved the murder. As they were killing Stephen he prayed and said, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* (Acts 7:59–60).

And with these words Stephen reposed, and his spirit ascended to God. This occurred on December 26 in A.D. 34. The Christians who together with the Theotokos had witnessed Stephen’s feat buried his body. The Church honors Saint Stephen as the first deacon and martyr.

Filled with bloodlust, the murderers burst into the city and staged a terrible riot. According to one tradition, in those days up to two thousand Christians were killed. At that time the deacons Timon and Permenas also perished. Saul was particularly savage, breaking into the homes of Christians and dragging any believer to prison.

The memory of the first-martyr is celebrated on **December 27/January 9** and on **August 2/15**.

## THE PREACHING IN SAMARIA AND THE CONVERSION OF THE ETHIOPIAN (Acts 8)

**I**n the wake of the persecutions nearly all the Christians except the apostles fled from Jerusalem. And God’s Providence so arranged it that these persecutions merely served to strengthen the Church. The deacon Philip came preaching to the Samaritans, who practiced a heretical variation of Judaism. There he worked numerous miracles and baptized a great many people. And the whole city was seized with joy, seeing their deliverance from the power of the demons and of death. For the demons went out of the possessed with loud cries, and the paralyzed and the lame were restored to health. Among those who received baptism was one of the sect leaders, named Simon, who had previously attempted to use magic tricks to pass himself off as a god.

Upon learning that their preaching had been successful, the apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria, so that through the laying on of hands they might bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the newly baptized. Philip him-

self, being a deacon, had no power to bestow the gifts of the Comforter. To this day, these same gifts are bestowed through chrismation with holy chrism only by the successors of the apostles—the bishops and the priests whom they appoint. Simon attempted to purchase the gift of the priesthood for himself, for which he incurred Peter’s severe condemnation. Since that time the grave sin of purchasing a clerical rank has been called *simony*.

When the apostles were enlightening the Samaritans an angel commanded Philip to go along the road toward Gaza. At that time an Ethiopian eunuch, a courtier of the Ethiopian queen Candace, was riding in a chariot along that road. He was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah, which describes the voluntary sufferings of the righteous servant of the Lord (Is. 53). The Holy Spirit commanded Philip to approach the chariot.

“Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked the Ethiopian.

*How can I, except some man should guide me?* (Acts 8:31) he replied, and invited the deacon to get into the chariot.

Beginning with these words of the prophet, Philip proclaimed to him the good news of Jesus and explained to him the principles of the faith. As they went they came to a certain body of water.

*See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?* (Acts 8:36) the eunuch asked.

*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest* (Acts 8:37), Philip replied.

*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God* (Acts 8:37), the Ethiopian said.

Then Philip baptized him, and when he had come out of the water the Holy Spirit descended upon the eunuch, and an angel caught up the deacon and set him down in Azotus. In the meantime the Ethiopian joyfully arrived at his house, and there proclaimed the faith in Christ the Savior. Thus was fulfilled the ancient prophecy of King David that *ambassadors will come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall hasten to stretch out her hand unto God* (Ps. 67:32).

Philip preached the Gospel throughout the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The apostles ordained him bishop of the city of Tralia. He had four daughters, who were prophetesses. In venerable old age he departed to the Lord.

The memory of the apostle Philip is celebrated on **October 11/24**.

## THE CONVERSION OF SAUL (Acts 9)

**W**hen the Lord’s teaching was being spread among the pagans, Saul became inflamed with rage. The Church of Jerusalem went underground, and he decided that it was time to expand his efforts to other cities. For this pur-



pose Saul went to the high priest and obtained from him a letter to the Jews in Damascus, so as to arrest the disciples of the Savior there as well.

When he and his companions were approaching Damascus, suddenly a light brighter than the sun shone upon them from heaven. Saul fell to the ground, and heard a voice:

“Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?”

Saul asked, *Who art Thou, Lord?* (Acts 9:5).

*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest*, came the answer. *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks* (Acts 9:5).

Then in terror Saul cried, “Lord, what am I to do?”

“Arise and go into the city,” the Lord replied. “There you will be told what you should do. It is for this purpose that I appeared: to appoint you a minister and a witness of what you have seen and of what I shall reveal to you, delivering you from the people of the Jews and from the Gentiles to whom I will send you to open their eyes, that they might be converted from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, and by faith in Me might receive forgiveness of sins and a portion with the sanctified.”

Saul’s companions saw the light and heard the sounds of the voice, but they did not see Him Who appeared and did not understand His commands. They took Saul, blinded by the light of the glory of God, and led him to Damascus. There he fasted and prayed for three days, repenting of his evil deeds.

In Damascus the Christian Church was headed by the bishop Ananias, one of the seventy disciples of the Lord. Appearing to him, Christ commanded him to go and baptize Saul.

Then Ananias protested: “Lord, I have heard from many how much evil he has brought upon Your saints in Jerusalem, and he is to do the same here.”

But the Lord Jesus said, *Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My name’s sake* (Acts 9:15–16).

Then Ananias went to Saul and, laying hands on him, said, “The Lord Jesus Who appeared to you along the way has sent me that you might receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The God of our fathers has chosen you that you might see the Righteous One and become His witness. Why then do you delay? Arise, be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus!”

Immediately it was as though scales fell away from Saul’s eyes, and he was immediately baptized, and taking sacred food he was strengthened. After this he was taught by the disciples in Damascus and went to Arabia. There he spent three years. Upon returning Saul refuted the Jews in the synagogues, demonstrating that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Realizing that he could not be refuted, the fanatics decided to kill the new convert, and to this end they lay in wait for him at the gates. Then the Christians let Saul down in a basket, and he went to Jerusalem.

There he was not at first trusted, but then Saint Barnabas brought him to the apostles, and they pronounced Saul faithful to God.

He preached much in the synagogues, and here attempts were made on his life. Once Saul was praying in the Temple, and Christ appeared and commanded him to leave Jerusalem, since here his witness to Christ would not be received.

“I will send you far away, to the Gentiles,” said the Lord.

After this revelation the brethren sent Saul instead to Caesarea, and from there to his native Tarsus. Thus the vicious persecutor became a disciple of the Risen Christ!

The apostle Ananias is commemorated on **October 1/14**.

## THE CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS THE CENTURION (Acts 9:32–11:26)

**T**he apostle Peter visited the churches in Judea, strengthening all in the faith of Christ. In the city of Lydda he found a sick man who had been paralyzed for eight years, named Aeneas.

Peter said to him, “Aeneas! Jesus Christ heals you!”

And immediately the sick man got up from his bed.

In Joppa (now a suburb of Tel-Aviv) the apostle resurrected the Christian woman Tabitha, who was noted for her charity. Thus the Spirit of God showed that charity invokes the Lord’s aid even after a person’s death.

After this great miracle Peter stayed for a time at the house of Simon the Tanner. Then God showed that the time had come to address the preaching not only to the Jews, but to all the peoples of the earth.

In Caesarea lived an officer named Cornelius, who feared God and gave considerable alms. An angel appeared to him and said, *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter ... he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do* (Acts 10:4–6).

From this we see that good works in and of themselves cannot save a person. They only attract grace to him, which is then bestowed upon the person through the sacraments.

Cornelius fulfilled the angel’s command and sent servants to the house that the heavenly messenger had indicated.

The next day Peter went up to the rooftop to pray. As he prayed, in ecstasy he saw a vessel like a large sheet descending from heaven, filled with various animals and creeping things.

A voice from heaven commanded him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat!"

"No, Lord," Peter answered. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (anything forbidden by the Law of Moses).

*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common* (Acts 10:15), replied the voice from heaven.

This happened three times, and the vessel again ascended to heaven. At that same time those who had been sent by Cornelius came to the house and called the apostle. While Peter was pondering the vision the Holy Spirit commanded him to go with them, for He had sent them.

When they came to the house of Cornelius, the centurion gathered all his relations and friends to listen to the Word of God. Then the apostle understood what the vision had meant. It had shown that for God there was no longer anyone who was impure or unclean.

Cornelius recounted the angel's appearance and asked Peter to tell them the Word of God.

Peter answered, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; Whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins* (Acts 10:34–43).

While he was still preaching the Holy Spirit descended upon those gathered, so that they began to glorify God and speak in foreign tongues. By this God bore witness that the conversion of the Gentiles to Christ was pleasing to Him, and that they need not observe the Law of Moses.

Then Peter said, *Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?* (Acts 10:47). And immediately he baptized them all in the name of Christ. From that moment began the conversion of the Gentiles to the Lord. And those of the converted Jews who were dissatisfied with this were reconciled to it, seeing the will of the Holy Spirit.

Many members of the Jerusalem community who had scattered after the persecutions preached the Word of God in various countries of the world. In Antioch also numerous Gentiles received the teaching of the Lord. There the disciples first began to be called Christians. Thus the ancient prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, that the Lord God shall *call His servants by another name: That he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth* (Is. 65:15–16).

Cornelius left the army and was ordained by the apostle Peter as the first bishop of Caesarea. He was executed for Christ while preaching in the city of Scepia.

Saint Cornelius the Centurion is commemorated on **September 13/26**.

## THE PERSECUTION BY HEROD AGRIPPA (Acts 12)

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Soon after this a wave of new persecutions inundated the Church of Jerusalem. King Herod Agrippa sentenced to death one of the three greatest apostles of Christ—James the son of Zebedee. When he was being led to death, the man who had betrayed the apostle repented of his deed and ran in tears to ask his forgiveness. Saint James not only forgave the traitor, but even kissed him. Then the traitor declared himself a Christian, and for this he was executed along with the apostle. Thus the apostle James drank the Cup of Christ and was baptized with His Baptism, as the Lord had promised him (Mt. 20:23).

Seeing that his execution pleased the Jews, Herod ordered that the apostle Peter also be arrested and thrown into prison, with the intention of killing him at the end of the Passover. During this time the whole Church prayed fervently for Peter.

During the night, on the eve of the trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fettered by two chains. An angel appeared to him and commanded him to gird himself, put on his sandals and cloak, and follow him. Peter followed the angel, thinking he was beholding a vision. Before him the closed gates of the prison opened, and when Peter reached the end of the street the angel became invisible. Only then did Peter realize that his deliverance had actually occurred. He came to the house of Mary, the mother of the apostle Mark, where Christians were gathered, and began knocking at the door. A servant girl, Rhoda, was so overjoyed at hearing that she forgot to open the door, and ran to tell the Christians. At first they thought she had lost her mind. Then they said it was the apostle's guardian angel. The whole time Pe-

ter continued knocking. When at last they opened the door the apostle told them how God had freed him. Then he left the city.

In the meantime Herod learned of Peter's disappearance, and ordered that the guards be executed, while he himself went to Caesarea. There in the theater the people met the king with great ceremony, and as he was speaking with them they all cried, "It is the voice of God, not of a man!"

And immediately the angel of God struck him down for failing to give the glory to the Lord, and he died, eaten alive by worms.

The apostle James the son of Zebedee is commemorated on **May 13**.

## THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL (Acts 15)

In Antioch several false teachers appeared who said that faith in the Lord's death and Resurrection were insufficient, and that the newly-converted gentiles needed to observe the Mosaic Law and to be circumcised. Then the apostles Barnabas and Paul began arguing with them. When the uproar intensified, it was decided to send Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem to the other apostles.

When they arrived, the apostles and the presbyters assembled to deliberate the issue. Then Peter said, *God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?* (Acts 15:8–10).

Barnabas and Paul described the signs that God had worked among the gentiles. Finally the apostle James, the brother of God, summarized the matter, saying that the conversion of the Gentiles was in fulfillment of the predictions of the prophets. This being the fulfillment of the plan that God had conceived from eternity, there was no need to burden the new converts by requiring them to observe the Mosaic Law and to be circumcised.

Then the apostles wrote an epistle to the Church of Antioch. In it they said that the preachers of Judaism among the Christians had not been sent by the apostles. The Holy Spirit and the apostles deemed it right to forbid nothing but fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols, things strangled, and blood. Likewise one must not do to others what one would not wish done to oneself. This decision has determined the life of the Church to the present day. We no longer adhere to the Jewish laws, which Christ repealed; rather we strive to live according to the Gospel, obtaining justification through the Orthodox faith.

## THE DORMITION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

According to Tradition, after Pentecost the Most-pure Theotokos lived in Jerusalem with the apostle John. By lot she was given Georgia in which to preach, but an angel appeared to her and said that this country would be enlightened later, and that the Lord had prepared another for her.

For a time she lived with the apostle John in Ephesus. Once she decided to visit Lazarus, whom the Lord had raised from the dead. He was the bishop of Cyprus, in Larnaca. When the ship bearing the Ever-virgin was sailing on the sea a terrible storm arose, and instead of Cyprus it was driven to the shores of Athos. Mary went ashore, and immediately all the idols on the peninsula toppled down, and the demons that inhabited them declared the arrival of her of whom God had been born. The amazed people ran to the dock, and seeing the Virgin they converted to Christ. The Theotokos called Athos her domain upon the earth. After this she sailed to Lazarus and presented him with an omophorion (a symbol of episcopal rank) that she herself had embroidered.

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Then she returned to Jerusalem and remained in prayer, awaiting her end from God. Frequently she prayed at the Lord's tomb, on the Mount of Olives, and in Bethlehem. Once the archangel Gabriel appeared to her and presented her with a palm branch from Paradise, and foretold that in three days' time she would appear before her Son.

Upon learning of this Mary rejoiced in spirit and related it to all the apostles. She gave away all her belongings to poor widows, and left instructions that she be buried in the sepulcher of her parents in Gethsemane. The day of her death arrived. Joyfully she lay down upon the funeral bed. At that moment the angels brought to her all the apostles from all the ends of the earth upon the clouds of the air. Joyfully Mary bid them farewell.

At nine in the morning a clap of thunder was heard, and Christ appeared, surrounded by angels. In gladness the Virgin surrendered her soul to Him, and it was carried up into heaven. Weeping, the apostles bore her body away to be buried. The angels likewise joined in the beautiful hymns of the God-seers. A cloud covered the bier that held the body of the Theotokos, not permitting the Jews to molest it.

Only one priest, Athonias, broke through to the body of the Mother of God, and reached out intending to fling it to the ground. But immediately an angel cut off his wicked hands. Only after Athonias repented were his hands rejoined to his body, and he became a Christian.

The life-bearing body was buried in Gethsemane, and the apostles wept over it. On the third day the apostle Thomas also came, who once again



had arrived too late for the sacrament of the burial. He wept at not having bid the Theotokos farewell, and at his request the apostles rolled away the stone from her tomb. But in the grave her body was not to be found. The apostles were perplexed at this occurrence. But then the Ever-virgin herself appeared and assured them that God had raised her from the dead. As an assurance of this she threw Thomas her sash, as a sign that now she, the first Victress among men, had been carried up to God in the flesh and now sits upon a heavenly throne (Rev. 3:21), where she always prays for us. Her intercession saves us from every danger, for her Son always heeds the voice of His Mother.

The feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church. It is celebrated on August 28, and is preceded by the two-week Dormition Fast.

## THE APOSTLE THOMAS IN INDIA

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To the apostle Thomas fell the lot of preaching in India. Upon learning of this, Thomas said, "I am a Hebrew. I do not know the Indian language, and I will not go to that country."

But the Lord Jesus appeared to the apostle and commanded him to go with a certain Indian merchant to King Gundafor and to present himself as an architect. (Archeological evidence of King Gundafor's reign has been found.) When they arrived the king appointed Thomas to build a palace for him, and gave him considerable gold for the purpose. The apostle took the money and gave it away to the poor in the king's name, while he himself preached the Gospel of Christ.

Two years later the king learned that his money had gone to the poor, while the palace was yet unbuilt. In a fury the king had Thomas thrown into prison and gave orders that he be flayed. But the apostle did not despair.

In the meantime the king's brother died. The angels led him into Paradise and showed him a beautiful palace. He began begging the angels to permit him to live in that abode. But they replied, "You cannot live here, for this is the palace of your brother, which Thomas built for him.

And at God's command the brother returned to life. Gundafor joyfully came to inquire after his risen brother, and promised to give him any gift.

To this his brother requested, "I need nothing; I myself will give you everything I have. Only let me have the palace that Thomas has built for you in heaven!"

When the king learned of the palace awaiting him in paradise he released Thomas, received baptism together with his brother, and became a Christian. And after his death he took up his abode in the heavenly palace.

Thomas went on to preach the Gospel in Parthia, West China, and South India.

While he was preaching in the region of Madras, the brahmins (pagan priests), infuriated by his preaching, impaled him with spears. Thus Thomas suffered by the spear, the mark of which he had touched upon the Risen Jesus.

The apostle Thomas is commemorated on **October 19**.

## THE APOSTLE ANDREW THE FIRST-CALLED

**A**ndrew, the apostle first called to Christ, preached in the countries of the north. The Spirit of God first led him to the territory of Northern Turkey. There the apostle ordained Stachys bishop of Byzantium (modern Istanbul). From him proceeds the entire chain of apostolic succession in the churches of both Russia and Constantinople.

Later he and the apostle Matthias set out for Adjara along the shore of the Black Sea. There the pagans, enraged by the preaching of the Creator, killed Matthias (his grave is near Batumi). The courageous Andrew continued his journey. Many trials awaited him along the way. In Abkhazia, where New Athos is now located, another apostle was killed: Simon of Cana, who was crucified upon a cross. And in the upper reaches of the Kuban the grace of God miraculously preserved the apostle Andrew from an attack by a tribe of cannibals.

The Spirit of God commanded him to go farther, and in the cities of Crimea he founded the first churches, after which he continued on up the Dnepr. When he sailed to the site of what would one day be Kiev, he erected a holy cross and foretold that the grace of God would be upon these mountains, and that here a great city would be built, that numerous churches would adorn this country, and that here Christianity would flourish. Then he went up to the Baltic Sea, and founded the first community on the Valaam Archipelago.

After this the apostle went to Rome, then departed for Greece. There in the city of Patras he converted numerous distinguished citizens to the Lord, including the ruler's wife. Then in anger the ruler of the city arrested Andrew and commanded him to renounce God on pain of death.

But Andrew replied, "Great is the mystery of the Cross. This death is the mystery of man's renewal. If I feared the Cross I would never have glorified it."

After this the ruler flung him into prison, but an uprising among the people freed him from imprisonment. The apostle exhorted the people to desist from revolution and not hinder his suffering. He voluntarily appeared before the ruler in court, and invited him to cast aside idolatry and become a Christian. At this the infuriated ruler ordered that Andrew first be beaten, then crucified.

Upon seeing the cross, made in the form an “X,” Andrew cried, “Rejoice, O cross, sanctified by the flesh of Christ and adorned by His members as by jewels! Before Christ was crucified upon you, you were terrible for men, but now men love you and receive you with longing, for the faithful know what gladness you conceal within you, and what reward lies beyond you. Receive me, for I have always loved and longed to embrace you, O precious cross, receiver of glorious adornment from the Lord’s members, long desired and fervently loved, which I have unceasingly sought. Take me away from among men and surrender me to my Teacher, that He Who redeemed me by you might receive me through you!”

When the apostle was crucified a new rebellion arose, but Andrew entreated the Lord to receive his soul, that he might not be prevented from completing his final ascetic feat. A heavenly radiance surrounded Andrew, and he ascended in soul to heaven.

His memory is celebrated on **December 13**.

## THE MISSIONARY TRAVELS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (Acts 13–28)

After the execution of the holy apostle James the Holy Spirit led forth one of His greatest witnesses to preach: the apostle Paul. The Church of Antioch was run by several prophets: Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul.

Once, as they were fasting, when the Divine Liturgy was being served the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Then the teachers of Antioch ordained them for the labor of preaching and released them. They began their preaching from the island of Cyprus, where they converted to Christ the proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus. A certain magician, Elymas, attempted to sway him from the Lord, at which Saul (who from that moment on took the name Paul) said that in punishment for his blasphemy he would be deprived of his sight. And so it occurred. After this the apostles departed to preach in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

In Lystra there was a man who had been lame from birth. Looking at him, Paul saw that he had faith to be healed, and said to him, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand up straight on your feet!”

Immediately he was restored to health. Seeing this the people cried, “The gods have descended to us in the form of men!” The priests prepared bulls to offer sacrifices to them.

Then Barnabas and Paul cried out, “What are you doing? We are men just like you. We ask you to reject these false gods and to serve the Creator of all.” By these words they barely restrained the people from offering sacrifices to them.

Several days later, at the instigation of the Hebrews, the Lyconians nearly stoned Paul to death. Only the power of God protected the apostle.

After this the apostles visited all the newly-established churches, ordaining presbyters in each.

After the Apostolic Council, which will be described later, Paul set off on a new journey. He passed through the churches already established, strengthening them in the faith. In Troas he beheld a vision: the guardian angel of Macedonia appeared to him, asking him to come and help him.

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As soon as the apostle Paul arrived in Europe, in Philippi a rich woman named Lydia converted to Christ, becoming the first European Christian woman. In that town a possessed servant girl who practiced divination followed the apostle and his companions about, crying, “These are the servants of the Most-high God, who proclaim to you the path of salvation.” But Paul drove out the demon of divination in the woman, not wishing to employ the testimony of the enemy.

Her masters, infuriated at having lost their source of profit through the servant girl’s healing, slandered Paul and his co-laborer Silas. They were beaten and thrown into prison, and their legs shut in the stocks. At midnight, as the apostles were praying to God, there was an earthquake so strong that the doors of the prison opened. The jailer was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped, but learning that all were in their places he converted to Christ along with his family. The city authorities wanted to release the apostles secretly, but at their demand they made them a public apology.

Next the apostle Paul preached in Thessalonica and in Berea, where he met with opposition from the Jews, to the point that some of the new converts were even thrown into prison. But the Christians ransomed them.

Saint Paul arrived in Athens, where he was astounded by the terrible idolatry in that city. He preached in the market, after which he was led to the supreme court—the Areopagus.

“Athenians,” the apostle said, “in walking among your shrines I have seen that you are particularly fearful of the demons. Among your altars I found an

altar dedicated to the unknown God. It is He, Whom you reverence without knowing, that I preach to you. He is God Who created the world and all that is in it. He, being the Lord of heaven and earth, lives not in temples made by hand, and does not require the service of men's hands, as though He had need of anything, for He Himself gives life and breath and every thing. From one blood He brought forth the whole race of man to inhabit the whole face of the earth, appointing predetermined times and bounds for their habitation, that they might seek God, hoping to feel Him and to find Him, though He is not far from each of us. Even your poets say that we live, move, and exist in Him. Hence we, as the generation of God, must not think that the Divinity is like gold or the work of men's hands. Now the times of ignorance have ceased, and God commands all men everywhere to repent. He has appointed a Day of Judgment, having witnessed to this through the Man Whom He raised from the dead."

Hearing of the Resurrection, the pagans laughed and said, "We will listen to that some other time!"

Only a few people converted to the Lord, among whom was the future great theologian of the Church, Dionysius the Areopagite.

Then the apostle Paul established the Church in Corinth. The Jews rejected his preaching, so he turned to the Gentiles. When the apostle began to grow weary from the persecutions the Lord appeared to him by night and said, *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city* (Acts 18:9–10).

In Corinth the apostle preached for a year and a half. Then, after visiting Antioch and Jerusalem, he went to Ephesus. There Paul converted twenty disciples of John the Baptist to Christ. For three years he preached in Ephesus, during which time God worked numerous miracles through the saint's hands. Even kerchiefs from his head healed the sick and drove out demons.

Several of the Hebrew exorcists even undertook, like the psychic adepts of today, to drive out demons by the name of "Jesus Whom Paul preaches." But once a demon said to the hapless exorcists, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?* (Acts 19:15). The possessed man beat them and drove them out naked into the street. After this many magicians brought their books to the apostle's feet and burned them. Thus was the Lord's name glorified, increasing and prevailing!

But the makers of idols, seeing their profits decreasing, incited a revolt against the apostle. The maddened crowd of pagans assembled in the theatre, and for two hours they yelled, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

The rulers of the city calmed the crowd, and Paul left the city.

In Troas he served the usual Sunday night-time Liturgy, during which a youth named Eutychus fell to his death from a window. But the apos-

tle resurrected the dead youth, and after communing all he continued his journey.

In Mitylene he assembled the bishops and presbyters, where he commanded that the teaching he had delivered to them be preserved. Paul foretold that after his departure savage wolves (heretics) would come to them, not sparing the flock of Christ that the Holy Spirit had entrusted to the Bishop. And among the pastors themselves there would be found those who would distort the Word of God, hoping to draw people after them. Hence, they were to be watchful, remembering the apostle's labors.

The disciples parted with their teacher in tears, particularly since he had foretold his arrest. After parting with them Paul left for Jerusalem. In Caesarea, where the apostles stopped with his companions, he was visited by the prophet Agabus. This man bound himself with Paul's belt and said, *Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles* (Acts 21:11).

They entreated Paul with tears not to go to Jerusalem, but he replied that he was prepared even to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Then the disciples said, "May God's will be done."

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Not long before the day of Pentecost the apostle Paul came to Jerusalem, where he was hospitably received by the apostle James and all the Christians from among the Jews. To avoid scandalizing the Jews, the Lord's brother asked Paul to offer sacrifice in the Temple of Jerusalem, as a sign of respect for the Mosaic Law. This he did. But as he was completing the rite of purification in the Temple he was attacked by a mob of Jews yelling that he had come to defile the sanctuary by bringing Gentiles into it. The mob began to beat Paul, but was driven back by Roman soldiers. Paul was chained, and the soldiers bore him away through the frenzied mob, as the Hebrews yelled, "Death to him!"

When he had been taken up some steps Paul asked permission to speak to the people. It was granted, and he addressed the crowd in the Hebrew tongue. In his speech the apostle related that he himself was a highly educated Jew, a zealot of the Law who had formerly persecuted Christians. But Christ Himself had converted him to Himself on the road to Damascus. After his baptism he had come to Jerusalem and prayed in the temple. Then the Lord had again appeared to him and sent him to preach to the Gentiles.

When the crowd heard about the Gentiles they cried, "He does not deserve to live!" As they said this they flung their clothes and dust into the air.

Then the officer commanded that the apostle be beaten, but upon learning of his Roman citizenship (which gave a person immunity) he became frightened that he had arrested him.

The next day the Sanhedrin was assembled, at which Paul chastised the high priest, then divided the assembly, declaring that he was being perse-



cuted for the sake of the chief hope of the Pharisees: faith in the bodily Resurrection. The head of the garrison, seeing the tumult that began, again protected Paul and sent him under escort to Caesarea, for several of the Hebrew fanatics had sworn to fast until they had killed the apostle.

There the apostle Paul remained for two years as a prisoner. The high priest accused the apostle of causing civil unrest. But the ruler Felix did not think it necessary to surrender Paul. The next ruler, Festus, offered to have him tried in Jerusalem, but Paul, knowing that he would be killed along the way, demanded to be tried by the emperor. Then Festus agreed to send him to Rome, but first he presented him to King Agrippa so that he could write his report.

When the apostle Paul appeared before the king he testified that he was on trial for the sake of the hope awaited by all twelve tribes of Israel—the resurrection of the dead—and that this hope was given by Jesus, who had appeared to Paul on the way to Damascus. He had sent the apostle to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins and a portion with those sanctified by faith in Him. And Paul had not resisted the heavenly vision, and had declared repentance to all who listened, for which he had been arrested by the Jews.

While Paul was speaking, Festus exclaimed, "You are mad, Paul! Your over-bookishness makes you mad!"

But the apostle replied, *I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner* (Acts 26:25–26).

King Agrippa and Festus found in him nothing worthy of death, and would have freed the apostle if he had not already appealed to Caesar's judgment. Then they sent him on a ship to Rome. The journey was fraught with severe storms. In the end, as Paul had predicted, the ship was wrecked near Malta. But before the ship's destruction the apostle had a vision: an angel of God said that only the ship would be lost, but that all who were on it would be saved for the apostle Paul's sake. And so it happened. All reached the island in safety.

The local inhabitants took in the shipwreck victims and lit a fire for them. Paul gathered a number of sticks for the fire. Suddenly a cobra crawled out of the sticks and sank its fangs into the apostle's hand. He shook it off into the fire and remained unharmed, in accordance with the Savior's promise, at which the islanders decided he was a god. After this the apostle was received at the estate of the most distinguished person on the island, Publius (who later became a bishop), whose father he healed of dysentery by laying hands on him and praying.

Finally, Paul and his companions arrived in Rome. There he remained alone along with a soldier to whom he was shackled. The Jews would come to him, and the apostle preached Christ to them. But they refused to receive the good news. Then Paul said that *the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it* (Acts 28:28).

Thus, teaching to all the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, the apostle lived in Rome for two years, until his accusation had expired. It was during this period that the majority of the epistles were written. After this he was released for lack of accusers, and he set out to preach further—to Spain, Illyricum (Yugoslavia), and Asia Minor.

## THE REPOSE OF THE CHIEFS OF THE APOSTLES

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On July 12 in the year 67 the earthly sojourn of the apostles Peter and Paul reached its end in Rome. As the Lord had foretold after His Resurrection, when Peter grew old he stretched out his hands, and another girded him and led him where he did not wish (Jn. 21:18).

This occurred after the triumph of the apostles Peter and Paul over Simon Magus. This heretic, whom the apostle Peter had put to shame in Samaria, did not repent, but went to Rome, saying that he was a great power of God. When the apostles Peter, Paul, and John came to Rome he attempted to oppose them with his magic arts. However, as usual, the power of the demons proved insignificant before the might of the Creator. The angry Simon assembled the Romans and told them he was leaving them because they had believed in Peter instead of him, and that after supposedly ascending to the Father he would rain down vengeance upon the eternal city. With these words, before the eyes of those gathered at the forum the magician began to rise up into the sky. But the apostle Peter prayed to God, and by the name of Christ he forbade the demons to uphold the magician, and he fell to his death in the sight of all those present at the forum. Thus was his boastfulness and impotence revealed. The emperor Nero was angered by the death of his favorite, particularly since through the apostles' preaching two of his mistresses had deserted him. So he prepared to put the preachers to death.

A terrible persecution was unleashed upon the Christians. They were burned on poles like torches, and fed to beasts in the circus. The chiefs among the apostles fearlessly supported them in their sufferings. The apostle Paul, having received a revelation from Christ, wrote to his disciple Timothy:

*I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing* (2 Tim. 4:6–8).

The apostle Paul was arrested and thrown into the Mamertine Prison. Detectives were also searching for the apostle Peter, and the Christians convinced him to flee from Rome. As Peter was going through the gate he saw Christ going to meet him.

Bowing down, Peter asked, “Where are you going, Lord?”

He replied, “I am going to Rome, to be crucified again in Your place.”

And the Lord became invisible. Only the print of His bare foot remained upon a stone. Peter wept and returned to Rome, realizing that the Lord desired to suffer together with him. He was arrested and thrown into the same Mamertine Prison, where he converted the prison guards and forty-seven prisoners. These the apostle baptized in a spring that miraculously gushed forth from the wall.

The day of their execution arrived. The apostles and the other condemned Christians were led out of the prison, and they walked together until they reached the gate, where they were separated. For the last time in this life the apostles kissed.

Paul said to Peter, “May peace be with you, foundation of the Church and pastor of Christ’s sheep!”

Peter replied to Paul, “Go in peace, preacher of good and guide of the righteous on the path to salvation!”

The apostle Paul, being a Roman citizen, was executed by beheading. On the place where his head fell three springs gushed forth. His relics rest in Rome, in the Basilica of Saint Paul.

The apostle Peter was crucified. But since he considered himself unworthy to die the same death as the Lord, at his request he was crucified upside down. Before Peter’s execution his wife Mariamni was beheaded. In parting he said to her, “Remember the Lord!”

The apostle’s relics repose in Saint Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican.

After their deaths the apostles ascended to Heaven. There they abide with Christ and look after the Church to this day. On the Day of Judgment they will sit together with their Teacher. Concerning this Saint John Chrysostom says, “Think on this and tremble: what a sight Rome will behold when Paul and Peter arise there from their graves and are caught up to meet Christ!”

The commemoration of the apostles Peter and Paul (July 12) is one of the great feasts of the Orthodox Church. It is preceded by a fast that begins one week after Pentecost.

## THE REPOSE OF THE APOSTLE JAMES, THE BROTHER OF THE LORD

When the apostles dispersed throughout the world, the apostle James, the Lord's stepbrother, began to oversee the Church of Jerusalem. Ancient tradition relates that he was ordained bishop by Christ Himself after the Resurrection.

All called him righteous, both Christians and Jews. He was holy from his mother's womb, and he was given the right to enter the sanctuary of the Temple, there to offer prayers for the Hebrew people. From his numerous prostrations his knees became like a camel's.

He wrote an epistle to all Christians in which he taught concerning the significance of good deeds. Likewise he compiled the first text of the Divine Liturgy, which bears his name, and the prayers of the sacrament of unction, or the blessing of oil.

James preached to all that Jesus is the Christ and the Savior of the world. And many tens of thousands of Jews accepted the faith in Jesus as the Messiah Who had come. The high priest Annas and the Pharisees decided to kill James. And so on the feast of the Passover in A.D. 63 they seized James and placed him on the roof of the Temple.

There the Pharisees yelled at him, "Righteous one, we are all bound to trust you. The people are confused concerning Jesus the Crucified One! Declare to us what this 'door of Jesus' is!"

The apostle replied in a loud voice, "Why do you ask me concerning the Son of Man? He sits in Heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and will come upon the clouds of heaven."

Then many believed and cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

But the Pharisees in a fury said, "We were unwise to allow him to bear witness in this way. Let us kill him so that no one will believe him!"

And climbing up to the roof of the Temple they cried out, "The righteous one also is deluded!" And they threw him down, and then began to stone him.

James knelt and prayed for his killers: "Father, I pray Thee, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Then a certain Rechabite, a descendent of the righteous Rechab of old, cried out, "What are you doing? The righteous one is praying for you!"

But a draper struck the apostle on the head with a wooden pin, and James died. This crime proved the last drop, at which the cup of God's wrath overflowed. Immediately the Jewish War began, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem.

The apostle James is commemorated on **November 5**, and on the first Sunday after Christ's Nativity. In the Churches of Jerusalem and Cyprus his Liturgy is served on his feast day.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

As the Lord had foretold, in punishment for decide the wrath of God descended upon Jerusalem. In A.D. 66 the Jewish Rebellion began. Throughout the Roman Empire the Jews began a war attempting to restore Judean independence and achieve world domination. They believed that God would come to their aid and give all their enemies into their hands. But the reverse proved true: even before the rebellion began numerous signs indicated the impending wrath of God.

Once, at six o'clock in the morning, the eastern gates of the inner porch of the Temple, which were of brass and so heavy that it took twenty people



working with all their might to close them each evening, suddenly swung open of their own accord. On the day of Pentecost the priests, entering the inner porch at night to serve, heard a multitude of voices that said, “Let us leave this place!” During the sacrifice at the feast a cow gave birth right in front of the altar. One man, seized by the Spirit, walked the city streets, crying, “Woe to you, O Jerusalem!” This he did for seven years, and did not stop despite being tortured. At last he cried, “Woe is me!”—and immediately he fell dead from a stone launched by a Roman catapult.<sup>103</sup>

The general Vespasian and his son Titus crushed the rebellion. On Passover (the very time when the Lord was killed) in the year 69 siege was laid to Jerusalem. In August of the year 70 it was taken, and the Temple was burned, against the will of the conqueror, on the very day when the first Temple of Solomon had fallen. Hundreds of thousands of Hebrews perished from the terrible food shortage in the besieged city (which even led to cannibalism), as well as at the hands of zealot guerrillas, who suspected everyone of secret treason, and from the plague. All around Jerusalem the land was filled with crosses upon which Jews were crucified. After the city was taken, up to a million Hebrews were taken to Egypt by ship and sold into slavery. Thus was the ancient prophecy of Moses fulfilled concerning the punishment of the Hebrews for breaking the Covenant with God (Deut. 28:68).

Not a single Christian perished during the rebellion, however, for remembering the Savior’s prophecy the entire Church of Jerusalem left Palestine and settled in Pella (modern Jordan). There the Judeo-Christian Church of the apostle James gradually merged with all the communities from among the Gentiles, and the stumbling block of legalism was overcome.

In A.D. 135 the Hebrews again rebelled, led by the false messiah Bar-Kokhba, who had persecuted Christians, but this rebellion likewise was crushed, and the Hebrews were driven out of the Holy Land, to which they succeeded in returning only in the 20th century.

## THE APOSTLE JOHN ON PATMOS (Rev. 1)

When Nero killed the apostles Peter and Paul he wished to kill the apostle John as well. But the Lord preserved him unharmed. The apostle left Rome for Ephesus. Along the way his ship was wrecked, and the apostle was at sea

<sup>103</sup> Josephus Flavius, *The Judean War*, IV, 5.



for 14 days. But God delivered him from this misfortune as well. Arriving at Ephesus the saint came to the feast of the goddess Artemis, where he denounced the mindlessness of idolatry. At first the pagans attempted to kill the apostle, but after a series of miracles that he performed thousands of people received holy baptism.

The devil did not sleep, however. In the year 91 the emperor Domitian began a new persecution of Christians. The apostle John was arrested and taken to Rome. The saint was given a cup of poison to drink, but the poison did not harm him. Then he was flung into a kettle of boiling oil. But from this too he emerged unscathed. The angry emperor exiled the apostle to a quarry on the island of Patmos. There John converted and baptized all the local inhabitants. The wizard Cynops attempted to turn the people away from Christ, and to prove his power he went into the sea, relying on demonic power to preserve him. But Saint John forbade the evil spirits to preserve the sorcerer, and he drowned.<sup>104</sup>

Once, when the apostle John was in the Spirit on a Sunday, he heard a voice behind him: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last."

Turning, he saw seven golden candlesticks (a symbol of the seven churches), and Christ in their midst, robed in royal garments and girded with a golden belt upon His breast. His head and hair were white as snow, His eyes were like flame, and His feet were as though heated red-hot in an oven. In His right hand were seven stars (the angels of the churches), and from His lips came a sharp sword (the Word of God). His face was as the sun, shining in its power.

Christ sent an epistle to the seven churches and revealed to His beloved apostle the secrets of the future, which are written in the Book of the Apocalypse. By delving into this mystical Book we learn what awaits the Church in the future.

## THE REPOSE OF THE APOSTLE JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN

After the death of the emperor Domitian the apostle John was returned from exile, and he went to Ephesus. There the three Gospels were brought to him, which he approved, and at the request of the Christians he wrote his own Gospel to supplement the other three. In his Gospel the apostle

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<sup>104</sup> Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox Calendar, by St. Demetrius of Rostov, for September 26 (old style).

John particularly emphasizes the Divine nature of Christ. For this reason he begins his book with a declaration of the existence of God the Word before the world was. It is for this reason that the apostle John was called “the Theologian.” In his Gospel John likewise disproved the heresies that had arisen, which denied the authenticity of Christ’s human nature. In addition the apostle wrote three epistles, in which he teaches Christians to abide in love and truth.

The apostle traveled through cities and towns, everywhere preaching the Word of God. Once he converted a youth to Christ, then entrusted him to a bishop’s care. The bishop taught him the basics of the faith, baptized him, then left him to his own devices. The youth fell into bad company, and ended up becoming the leader of a band of robbers. When John returned to the city, he called the bishop to account. In answer the bishop tearfully replied that the youth had died to God.

“A fine guardian I chose for my brother!” John exclaimed. And mounting a horse despite his advanced age he galloped off into the mountains in search of the robber chieftain. Seeing him the chieftain tried to flee, but John raced after him, promising him God’s forgiveness. The youth fell to the ground and repented. The apostle kissed him and said that God had forgiven him. Thus John sought out the one sheep that had strayed from Christ’s flock.

When the apostle had reached great old age, to the point that he was carried to church, instead of lengthy sermons he said only, “Children, love one another!”

Once his disciples asked him why he constantly repeated the same thing. John replied, “This was the Lord’s commandment, and if you keep it that is sufficient.”

Upon learning through the Spirit of the day of his repose, John bade all farewell, and ascended to the top of a hill with his most intimate disciples. There they dug him a shallow cruciform grave. Having kissed the disciples and blessed them, John lay down in the grave and ordered them to sprinkle earth over him, which they did. When the other Christians learned of this they dug up the grave site, but found no body there. John had been mystically taken from this world in the body, and he awaits the end times, when the prophecies revealed to him by God will come to pass.

Each year the empty sepulcher in Ephesus would be covered in a pink fragrant dust that healed all who came there.<sup>105</sup>

The apostle is commemorated on **October 9** and **May 21**.

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<sup>105</sup> The Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox calendar, by Saint Demetrius of Rostov, for September 26 (old style).

## THE HOLY SCRIPTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Originally the Church of Christ existed without Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit and the oral Tradition of the apostles. But soon the devil stirred up against the Church the false teachings of heretics, who began to distort Orthodox teaching, citing their pseudo-gospels. Then, lest Divine Revelation be distorted and the Lord's true words be mingled with falsehood, the apostles wrote the four Gospels by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first written was the Gospel of Matthew. The apostle Matthew wrote it for the Church of Jerusalem in the Hebrew language, and ten years later it was translated into Greek. Then at the request of the Roman Christians the apostle Mark wrote down the sermons of the apostle Peter. The apostle Luke compiled all the true traditions concerning Christ from eyewitness accounts and wrote a Gospel for the newly-converted Christian Theophilus, adding to it the book of the Acts of the Apostles. As has been said above, all these Gospels were approved by Christ's beloved disciple John, who also wrote his own Gospel, as well as the book of Revelation (the Apocalypse) and three epistles to the churches.

Epistles were also written by the apostles Peter (two), James, and Jude. All these epistles are called *conciliar* or general. But the Holy Spirit wrote the greatest number of epistles through the apostle Paul (14).

The chronology of the writing of the books of the New Testament is as follows:

**The Gospel of Mark.** Traditionally dated at A.D. 41–55, though the exact time of its composition cannot be reliably determined. Some researchers believe that the Gospel of Matthew may have been compiled second, after that of Mark. There is no reason to doubt that it was written prior to the Gospels of Luke and John.

**The Gospel of Mark.** The exact date of its writing cannot be determined. Many researchers believe that the Gospel of Mark may have been written first, while others join Augustine in considering it the second, after that of Matthew. The majority of researchers concur that it was written prior to the Gospels of Luke and John. The most probable time of the book's creation is A.D. 60–70. Eusebius of Caesarea gives A.D. 43 as the date this Gospel was written.

**The Gospel of Luke.** The majority of researchers believe that it was created after the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and certainly prior to the Gospel of John. Tradition sets the book's creation in the 60s of the first century. However, many contemporary researchers believe the 70s–80s or the 80s–100s to be a more probable range.

**The Gospel of John.** The majority of academics set the date of the writing of the Gospel of John as A.D. 80–95 or 90–100.

The first and second epistles of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians—A.D. 51–52.

The epistles of the apostle Paul to the Philippians—A.D. 62–63.

The epistles of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians (first and second), to the Galatians, and to the Romans—A.D. 54–57.

The epistles of the apostle Paul to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and Philemon, and the first epistle of the apostle Peter—approx. A.D. 62–63.

The Acts of the Holy Apostles. Tradition sets the composition of the Acts in the 60s of the first century. Another version dates the Acts at A.D. 70–85.

The epistle of the apostle James. Since the date of the death of James, the brother of the Lord, has been positively confirmed—he was killed in A.D. 62—the epistle could not have been written after that year.

The first epistle of the apostle Paul to Timothy and his epistle to Titus—approx. A.D. 65.

The epistle of the apostle Paul to the Hebrews—A.D. 63–64.

The second epistle of the apostle Paul to Timothy, and the second epistle of the apostle Peter—A.D. 67.

The epistle of the apostle Jude. It is difficult to establish the exact date of the writing, but the most probable period is believed to be A.D. 62–70.

The three epistles of the apostle John—the 90s of the first century.

The Revelation of John the Theologian (the Apocalypse)—A.D. 95.

Over several centuries the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, painstakingly selected these epistles, separating them from falsifications and imitations. The final canon of the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament was adopted at the Council of Carthage in 419 and at the Council in Constantinople in 692.

## THE ERA OF THE MARTYRS

While still during the lifetime of the holy apostles there began the three-century era of the martyrs, the great witnesses of Christ's glorious victory over death. As the Holy Spirit said to the apostle John, *the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days* (Rev. 2:10).

Indeed, beginning with the persecutions by the emperor Nero, approximately ten persecutions against the Church may be listed:

The persecution of the emperor Nero (64–67), when the majority of the apostles were executed;

Under the emperor Domitian (A.D. 91);

Under the emperor Trajan (98–107);  
 During the reign of the emperor Mark Aurelius (177);  
 Under the emperor Septimius Severus (202);  
 During the reign of the emperors Decius and Gallus (250–252);  
 Under the emperor Valerian (257);  
 Under the emperor Aurelianus (275);  
 Under the emperor Diocletian (304);  
 Under the emperor Maximian (311).

The spiritual reason for the persecutions was indicated by the Lord Himself, Who said: *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ... They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me* (Jn. 15:19, 16:2–3). To the global community Christians are something strange, something foreign. They are like a sliver in one's body. For people who live by the passions, the teachings of the Risen Lord are a living reminder of their Heavenly Fatherland, which they have rejected for the sake of an earthly kingdom, and so they begin to persecute them with hatred, wishing thereby to destroy the voice of God in their hearts. Their master, the devil, knowing that he has little time remaining, pursues Christians in a fury, hoping to draw as many of God's creatures as possible down with him into eternal destruction. This is the more true since paganism, which the Church destroys, is Satan's beloved domain, where he and his servants were served by posing as gods. He has absolutely no desire to lose the servants who revere him. Hence, to the very end of the world he will persecute the Church, until Christ comes and frees us, and all His enemies will be flung down at the Lord's feet.

The outward reason for the three centuries of persecution against the Church is that the Church was accused of rejecting the state cult, preaching a new, non-traditional religion, and thereby undermining society itself.

An excellent example of the arguments of the pagan accusers is found in a quote from the martyric accounts of the holy martyr Carpus (commemorated October 13). The ruler Valerius, attempting to exhort the martyrs, said, "You are not unaware, I suppose, that glory and honor have been offered to the immortal gods from of old, and this continues to this day not only among us, who know the Greek and Roman languages, but also among the barbarous peoples. For through zeal for the gods the cities are ruled by good laws, victories are upheld over enemies, and the world is made fast ... Do you therefore honor them as well. And if through the words of ignorant men you have been led astray by the irrational Christian faith that has recently arisen, come to your senses now and return to what is better. Then the gods will also

have mercy on you, and you will enjoy the many good things we possess, for great mercies await you from the emperor.”<sup>106</sup>

Thus, for the pagans the proof of the soundness of any religion is its antiquity, the degree of its prevalence, and the conviction that a true religion must support the security of the state and provide for the material welfare of its followers. For them, Christianity was a dangerous anti-state sect and disloyal to the government (for it rejected the institution of emperor worship).

Normally no one objected to revering Christ as God. Christians were simply required to be tolerant of other religions and to make a gesture of courtesy toward the gods of the state. But worshiping statues was unthinkable for the Lord’s disciples, who knew that they concealed the powers of evil, nor was it possible for them to show respect for an obvious lie. Beside all this, the members of the Church knew that this lie and even merely burning incense before an idol would come at the cost of eternal destruction. Hence, every martyr executed for the name of Christ was not merely a victim of tragic circumstances, but a great conqueror of Satan and of every falsehood. It is with good reason that, as the ancient defender of Christianity Tertullian aptly noted, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

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Another cause of the persecutions was harassment and denunciations by the Jews who had rejected their Messiah. It was they who began the persecutions against the Church in Jerusalem, and it was they who instigated many of the persecutions against the Christians in the Roman Empire. Nor did their hatred for the Crucified Lord lessen after Christianity emerged victorious. One need only recall the terrible events of A.D. 614, when Jerusalem was seized by the Iranian Shah Khosrau, and Jewish merchants deliberately purchased Christians in order to kill them. This was done because the Jewish race had forgotten the Creator in favor of the earth. Small wonder that after Christ was rejected the faith of the prophets underwent such a degeneration that it became indistinguishable from paganism. Judaism became permeated with the doctrine of transmigration of souls, magic, the pantheistic doctrine that the world originated from God’s essence, and pagan concepts of the racial distinction of the Jews from other people. Hence, the news of the true Messiah Who had fulfilled all the expectations of the prophets and had saved not only the Jews, but all men, proved unthinkable for the apostates.

The holy martyrs destroyed all these theomachistic delusions by their fight. As Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage wrote (who himself became a martyr), martyrdom “is the foundation of life and faith, it is the cornerstone of salvation, the union of freedom and honor ... The glory of the martyrs is beyond all price, its greatness is boundless, its victory—bright, its merit—no-

<sup>106</sup> The Lives of the Saints, arranged according to the Orthodox calendar, by Saint Demetrius of Rostov, for October 13 (old style).



table, its name—priceless, its triumph—eternal. For one who is glorified by holy confession is adorned as it were with the very blood of Christ.”<sup>107</sup>

Hence, it is far more important for us to know the inner disposition of the martyrs than to see all the malicious schemes of the enemy. For the martyrs are citizens of heaven, heirs of Christ. Their fight itself is an image of Christian sanctity.

## SAINT IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER

A beautiful description of the spiritual aspiration that inspired the martyrs was given by Saint Ignatius, surnamed “the God-bearer.” According to Church Tradition he was the very child whom Christ set among the disciples and said, *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven* (Mt. 18:4). After the Lord’s Resurrection he became a disciple of the apostle John the Theologian.

In the year 67 the apostles Peter and Paul consecrated him bishop of Antioch. The holy hierarch Ignatius ruled the Church of Syria until the reign of the emperor Trajan. When the latter was in Antioch he arrested the saint, and when Ignatius refused to offer sacrifice to the gods he sentenced him to be devoured by beasts in the Colosseum.

In order to execute the sentence the arrested bishop was sent by convoy to Rome. Along the way he was met by messengers from the Christians of the various churches, and through them the martyr himself sent epistles to various communities. In these letters (of which seven survive) the hieromartyr exhorts Christians to keep the faith in Christ Jesus, God and man, to assemble more frequently for the Eucharist, and to obey the lawful bishop. “Those who are not with the bishop are not with Christ,” he said. Ignatius particularly warned against the heresies of the Docetists, who taught that the incarnation of God was a phantom, and of the Judaizers, who rejected the Gospel as an innovation.

Particularly noteworthy, however, is his epistle to the Church of Rome. He feared that through bribery the Christians might succeed in having the sentence reconsidered. In view of this danger Ignatius the God-bearer revealed the longing of his heart that led to his sufferings, and through them to God.

He wrote, “I am afraid of your love, lest it should do me an injury. For it is easy for you to accomplish what you please; but it is difficult for me to attain to God, if you spare me. For it is not my desire to act towards you as a man-pleaser, but as pleasing God, even as also you please Him. For neither

<sup>107</sup> Hieromartyr Cyprian of Carthage, *In Praise of Martyrdom*.

shall I ever have such [another] opportunity of attaining to God; nor will you, if you shall now be silent, ever be entitled to the honour of a better work. For if you are silent concerning me, I shall become God's; but if you show your love to my flesh, I shall again have to run my race. Pray, then, do not seek to confer any greater favour upon me than that I be sacrificed to God while the altar is still prepared; that, being gathered together in love, you may sing praise to the Father, through Christ Jesus, that God has deemed me, the bishop of Syria, worthy to be sent for from the east unto the west. It is good to set from the world unto God, that I may rise again to Him.

"You have never envied any one; you have taught others. Now I desire that those things may be confirmed [by your conduct], which in your instructions you enjoin [on others]. Only request in my behalf both inward and outward strength, that I may not only speak, but [truly] will; and that I may not merely be called a Christian, but really be found to be one. For if I be truly found [a Christian], I may also be called one, and be then deemed faithful, when I shall no longer appear to the world. Nothing visible is eternal. *For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* For our God, Jesus Christ, now that He is with the Father, is all the more revealed [in His glory]. Christianity is not a thing of silence only, but also of [manifest] greatness.

"I write to the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable good-will towards me. Allow me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may be no trouble to any one. Then shall I truly be a disciple of Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat Christ for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice [to God]. I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles; I am but a condemned man: they were free, while I am, even until now, a servant. But when I suffer, I shall be the freed-man of Jesus, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.

"From Syria even unto Rome I fight with beasts, both by land and sea, both by night and day, being bound to ten leopards, I mean a band of soldiers, who, even when they receive benefits, show themselves all the worse. But I am the more instructed by their injuries [to act as a disciple of Christ]; *yet am I not thereby justified* (1 Cor. 4:4). May I enjoy the wild beasts that are prepared for me; and I pray they may be found eager to rush upon me, which also I will entice to devour me speedily, and not deal with me as with some, whom,

out of fear, they have not touched. But if they be unwilling to assail me, I will compel them to do so. Pardon me [in this]: I know what is for my benefit. Now I begin to be a disciple. And let no one, of things visible or invisible, envy me that I should attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ. All the pleasures of the world, and all the kingdoms of this earth, shall profit me nothing. It is better for me to die in behalf of Jesus Christ, than to reign over all the ends of the earth ... Him I seek, who died for us: Him I desire, who rose again for our sake. This is the gain which is laid up for me. Pardon me, brethren: do not hinder me from living, do not wish to keep me in a state of death; and while I desire to belong to God, do not give me over to the world. Allow me to obtain pure light: when I have gone there, I shall indeed be a man of God. Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God. If any one has Him within himself, let him consider what I desire, and let him have sympathy with me, as knowing how I am straitened.

“The prince of this world would fain carry me away, and corrupt my disposition towards God. Let none of you, therefore, who are [in Rome] help him; rather be on my side, that is, on the side of God. Do not speak of Jesus Christ, and yet set your desires on the world. Let not envy find a dwelling-place among you; nor even should I, when present with you, exhort you to it, be persuaded to listen to me, but rather give credit to those things which I now write to you. For though I am alive while I write to you, yet I am eager to die. My love has been crucified, and there is no fire in me desiring to be fed; but there is within me a water that lives and speaks, saying to me inwardly, Come to the Father. I have no delight in corruptible food, nor in the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, the heavenly bread, the bread of life, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became afterwards of the seed of David and Abraham; and I desire the drink of God, namely His blood, which is incorruptible love and eternal life.

“I no longer wish to live after the manner of men, and my desire shall be fulfilled if you consent. Be willing, then, that you also may have your desires fulfilled. I entreat you in this brief letter; give credit to me. Jesus Christ will reveal these things to you, [so that you shall know] that I speak truly. He is the mouth altogether free from falsehood, by which the Father has truly spoken. Pray for me, that I may attain [the object of my desire]. I have not written to you according to the flesh, but according to the will of God. If I shall suffer, you have wished [well] to me; but if I am rejected, you have hated me.

“Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria, which now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. Jesus Christ alone will oversee it, and your love [will also regard it]. But as for me, I am ashamed to be counted one of them;

for indeed I am not worthy, as being the very last of them, and *one born out of due time* (1 Cor. 15:8-9). But I have obtained mercy to be somebody, if I shall attain to God.”

These wonderful words require no explanation. It is this living water of the Holy Spirit that elevated the martyrs through their sufferings to the heavens. We see how radically different the Christian martyrs are both from suicides, who in despair throw away their God-given lives, and from non-Christian heroes (such as champions of communism or the Islamic shahids) possessed by raging fanaticism. Our martyrs suffer not for a dead ideal, but for the living Christ. Their deaths are truly unto eternal life.

But let us return to the life of Saint Ignatius. When he arrived in Rome many Christians wanted nevertheless to have him freed, but he begged them with tears to do nothing of the kind.

The feast of Saturnalia arrived (the pagan New Year) on December 20 in the year 107, and the saint was led out into the Colosseum. Gazing upon those gathered, he cried out, “Men of Rome, who look upon my struggle! You know that I die not for any crime, but for the sake of my One God, with love for Whom I am encompassed and Whom I desire exceedingly. I am His wheat, and I will be ground by the teeth of the beasts, so as to become pure bread for Him.”

As soon as the saint had pronounced these words the lions were released, and they tore him to pieces, leaving only his bones. Thus the beasts became the saint’s grave, as he had wished.

The Christians collected his bones and buried them beside the city. All night they wept over his bones, and when they became wearied from their sobs and fell asleep Ignatius appeared to them, and embracing them he prayed for them to the Lord. They saw that he was covered with sweat from his great labor of contending with the devil, and that he stood before the throne of Christ. There he lives to this day, praying for all the churches.

The saint is commemorated on **January 2**.

## THE STRUGGLE OF THE CHURCH AGAINST PAGANISM AND GNOSTICISM

**I**n combating paganism the Church opposed it not only by the witness of the martyrs, but also by the arguments of reason. In the II–IV centuries a whole series of church writers appeared who defended Divine Revelation based on rational arguments. These are known as *apologists*. Many of them ended their lives as martyrs. The most well-known apologists were the holy martyr Justin the Philosopher, Saint Theophilus of Antioch, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Athenagoras, and the hieromartyr Cyprian, bishop of Carthage.

The life of Justin the Philosopher is an example of the fate of one apologist. He was a philosopher by profession. In Ephesus he was converted to Christianity by a certain elder, who showed him the irrationality of pagan philosophy and the logic of Christianity. Then Justin moved to Rome, and exercising his professional credentials established a school of philosophy where he taught Christianity.

He delivered two apologies in defense of Christianity to the emperor Antoninus Pius. In them Justin attempts to have the edicts abolished under which Christians were executed merely for bearing the name. He expounds the teaching of the Church and demonstrates that its basic tenets do not contradict those of the most renowned philosophers. On the contrary, the philosophical thought of Greece and Rome demonstrated the absurdity of the pagan myths. The result was that for a time the persecutions abated.

Justin likewise debated the rabbi Tryphon, demonstrating that Jesus is the true Messiah promised by the prophets, and the Only-begotten Son of God. He soon won the debate with the pagan philosopher. In revenge his opponent informed on him to the authorities. Then the ruler Rusticus summoned him for questioning, and when the saint refused to offer sacrifice to the idols he ordered his execution. Thus Justin proved a true defender of Christian teaching, defending it not only by his life, but also by his death.

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In addition to attacks from without, however, paganism attempted to infiltrate the Church from within. As early as the first century there appeared people who called themselves *Gnostics* (possessors of secret knowledge), of whom Simon Magus was the first (Acts 8:9–24). These pretended to be Christians, but secretly they taught that God the Creator of the world was not the Almighty and Infinite Being, but an incompetent sort of spirit, unworthy of veneration. They alleged that there were certain other gods above Him, who did not create the material world, but who created the souls of certain persons. Jesus Christ was supposedly their messenger, and He had not taken on an actual body, or at least had not suffered physically. Hence, they rejected the Old Testament and the Apostolic Church, considering it necessary only for people of a lower sort, while they with their knowledge possessed a secret teaching that was only passed down to a chosen few. Frequently the Gnostics slid into outright Satanism. In order to propagate their heresies they wrote *apocryphas* (secret books), falsely ascribed to the apostles (such as the “Gospel of Thomas,” the “Gospel of Truth,” the “Gospel of Peter,” and many others). Most dangerous of all was that they masqueraded as Orthodox, becoming indignant when excommunicated from the Church, and all the while attempting to corrupt the faithful.

The apostles, along with their immediate successors, had already begun speaking out against them. A series of apostolic epistles are directed against the Gnostics: the first and second epistles of John, the epistle to the Colos-

sians, and the apostle Paul's first epistle to Timothy. The Gospel of John is also of an anti-Gnostic nature. The apostle John's greatest disciple, the hieromartyr Polycarp of Smyrna, once met a Gnostic named Marcion (who rejected the Old Testament). When asked whether he recognized him he replied, "I recognize the firstborn of Satan!"

But a particular role in the victory over gnosticism belongs to Polycarp's spiritual son, the hieromartyr Irenaeus, bishop of the city of Lyons (France). He learned from the Gnostics their innermost secrets, and revealed their absurdity to the world in his five-volume work, *Against Heresies*. He showed in detail that Christ and all the apostles taught precisely what is taught by the Church. Based on Holy Tradition Saint Irenaeus demonstrated the authenticity of the books of the New Testament and the falseness of the counterfeit works of the heretics.

Through the labors of the holy hierarch, who died a martyric death in the year 202, as well as the efforts of Saint Hippolytus of Rome and many other ecclesiastical writers, the Gnostic heresies were routed and disappeared from the arena of history even before the persecutions had ended. But the ancient infection continues to fester to this day, preserved in secret societies. No sooner does the Church weaken than this falsehood immediately begins to seize people in its grasp. Even in our time Gnostic teachings have seen a rebirth in Theosophy, Freemasonry, the teachings of Roerich, and other occult movements.

Saint Justin the Philosopher is commemorated on **June 14**, and the hieromartyr Irenaeus of Lyons is commemorated on **September 5**.

## HOLY GREAT MARTYR GEORGE THE TROPHY-BEARER

**T**he greatest persecution of the Church proved to be the reign of Diocletian (284–305). This Roman emperor decided to strengthen his state by forcing all citizens to worship the Roman gods. He issued a series of edicts under which Christian temples were destroyed, sacred books were burned, and Christians were subjected to torture to force them to offer sacrifices to idols. The penalty for refusal was death. Historians estimate that several hundred thousand people suffered during this period. The persecutions lasted over a decade, and according to the church historian Eusebius, "even if a person had a hundred mouths and a throat of steel he would be unable to describe all the horror that descended upon the Christians."

First, however, the persecutions struck the army, where many Christians were then serving. One of these was George, a tribune (or general)



and a superb commander. Upon learning of the coming persecutions he freed all his slaves, gave away his valuables to the poor, and went to the emperor for an audience. There, before all the assembled court, George boldly confessed Christ as Creator of the universe and declared himself a Christian.

Diocletian was quite surprised, and invited the saint to offer sacrifice to the idols, promising in exchange to promote him and give him numerous riches and honors. But George in turn invited the king to become a Christian, saying that those who worship idols will perish.

At the emperor's command George was thrown into prison, his legs fastened in the stocks, and a heavy stone placed on his chest.

Diocletian then asked, "Do you repent, George, or do you persist in your disobedience?"

"Do you really think I am so exhausted that I will deny my faith after so little torture? You will sooner be wearied of torturing me than I of being tortured by you!"

Then George was hung upon a wheel that was turned over knives. During his sufferings the Lord encouraged the saint. An angel of God healed the martyr and took him down from the wheel. Seeing the miracle, two of the judges believed in Christ, and were immediately executed. George was thrown into a pit filled with quicklime. He signed himself with the sign of the cross, and the power of Christ preserved him unharmed.

But the emperor was not convinced even by this, and, calling George a sorcerer, had him first shod in boots with nails in them, then driven to the prison. To the prison the king sent a renowned magician, to subdue him by his diabolical art. The magician attempted to poison the saint, but the poison did not harm him (Mk. 16:18). Then the magician himself became a Christian, and was likewise executed.

Then Diocletian invited George to become co-emperor with him. Acting as though he were willing, the saint proposed that they go to the temple of Apollo.

There the martyr addressed the idol and asked it, "Do you wish to receive sacrifice from me as a god?"

The demon inhabiting the idol cried out, "I am not a god, not a god, nor are any of those who are like me! Only He Whom you confess is God, while we apostate angels deceive the people out of envy."

"How dare you remain here now that I, the servant of the true God, have come?" cried the saint.

At these words the demons fled with wails and loud cries, and their idols collapsed and were broken. The priests and the king attacked the saint in hatred and began to beat him. Finally the martyr was beheaded, and he went joyfully to the Lord on April 23, 304.

After his death Saint George appeared in Beirut (now the capital of Lebanon), which was frequently attacked by a dragon that devoured the people. To pacify the monster a child was given to it every day. One day the lot fell to the king's daughter. At that moment Saint George appeared to her, sitting on a white horse and holding a spear. He freed the maiden and, signing himself with the sign of the cross, charged the snake and ran it through with his spear. Then he commanded the maiden to tie a rope to the dragon and lead it into the city.

In the center of Beirut George said, "Do not fear the serpent; only hope in the Lord."

After this he killed the monster with a spear, and the citizens burned its carcass outside the city. Because of this miracle Saint George is depicted on a white horse, holding a spear, and he is called the Trophy-bearer ("bringer of victory").

The saint is commemorated on **May 6**.

## HOLY GREAT MARTYR CATHERINE

**D**uring the reign of Diocletian's successor, Maximian (305–313), there lived in Alexandria a wealthy, educated maiden of royal lineage named Catherine. Her relatives wanted to give her in marriage, but she replied, "I will only marry someone who is more intelligent, more distinguished, more handsome, and more wealthy than I."

Her mother, a secret Christian, decided to introduce her to her own spiritual father, who was in hiding outside the city. This man told Catherine that he knew a Youth Who met her requirements. He was more beautiful than the sun, His wisdom ruled the universe, His wealth was endless, and the nobility of His lineage was beyond comprehension. The maiden expressed a desire to meet Him, and the priest gave her an icon of the Theotokos holding the Divine Infant, instructing her to pray to the Virgin Mary to introduce her to Her Son.

All night Catherine prayed before the icon. At last she grew tired and dozed off. And in a vision she saw the Theotokos holding the Infant, but Christ had turned away from Catherine and did to wish to look at her.

Then the Theotokos addressed the Lord, saying, "Look at Catherine, and see how intelligent and beautiful she is!"

"I cannot bear to look at her," Christ replied. "She is so foolish, hideous, impoverished, and of such low birth that until she puts aside her ungodliness I cannot bear to see her. Let her go to the elder that gave her the icon, and do as he says, and then she shall see Me."



Hearing this, Catherine was amazed, and immediately she ran to the priest. He taught her the Orthodox faith, then baptized and communed her. The night after her baptism Catherine again prayed before the icon, and again saw the image come to life.

The Theotokos addressed Christ and asked, “Does this maiden please You, My Son?”

“Now she is beautiful and glorious; now she is rich and most wise,” the Lord replied. “I wish to take her in betrothal as My incorrupt bride.”

Then Catherine fell upon the ground and cried out, “I am unworthy, O most glorious Master, to see Your Kingdom, but vouchsafe me at least to be with Your servants!”

Then Christ placed a beautiful ring upon Catherine’s right hand as a sign that she had become His eternal bride.

Soon the emperor arrived in Alexandria, and Catherine denounced the mindlessness of his idolatry. Then Maximian ordered that the wise men be gathered, so that they might disprove the saint’s words. But Catherine overcame them in debate using the testimony of the pagan philosophers. Her opponents acknowledged Christ as God, and the furious emperor had them burned to death.

He then proceeded to torture the saint. She was beaten and starved, but Christ nourished her. Even in prison Catherine never ceased preaching the Word of God, and she converted her guards to Christ.

Catherine was strapped to a wheel, but an angel of the Lord broke the instrument of torture into pieces and freed the saint. Seeing the saint’s courage, the emperor’s wife believed in God. In a rage the emperor ordered that

both she and the guards be executed. Finally, despairing of overcoming Catherine, he had her beheaded.

Before her death she prayed for her executioners, and the angels immediately took her body and carried it to Mount Sinai, where they laid it on the highest peak, which now bears her name. There her relics were later found by monks. Today they rest in the monastery of Saint Catherine at the foot of Mount Sinai.

The holy great martyr Catherine is commemorated on **December 7**.

## THE VICTORY OF CHRISTIANITY OVER PAGANISM

As has been said, though the last of the ten persecutions was the most terrible, it was the final attempt of dying paganism to uproot Divine Revelation. The devil and all his servants were routed, and Christianity became the predominant religion.

This happened as follows. The western part of the Roman empire was ruled by two Caesars: Constantine in Gaul and Brittany, and Maxentius in Italy. Constantine no longer believed in multiple gods, but Maxentius was a fierce pagan, a persecutor of Christians, and at the same time a particularly tyrannical ruler. The Roman senate invited Constantine to take the throne, and he set out on a campaign to do so. Before the decisive battle Maxentius spent the whole night invoking the demons, offering them numerous sacrifices (including human beings). Constantine for his part was in a quandary. He did not know which of the gods to summon to his aid. His own army was far smaller than that of his adversary. Then Constantine turned to the One God in prayer, asking God Himself to help him. Then, on the eve of the battle, at noonday, he and many of his officers saw a Cross in the sky, shining more brightly than the sun, bearing the inscription, "By this sign conquer."

Astounded by the vision, Constantine fell into a deep sleep. And in a dream Christ appeared to him, showing him the sign of the Cross and commanding him to inscribe this image on all the standards of the army. The Lord promised to give Constantine the victory not only over Maxentius, but over all his enemies. Upon waking Constantine ordered that the victorious sign of the Cross be raised over the army, and that it be inscribed on their helmets, shields, and standards.

On October 28, 312, Constantine's forces routed Maxentius' army of pagans in the battle on the Milvian Bridge over the Tiber River. Maxentius himself fled and perished, crushed by the crowd. Neither magic, nor demons,

nor astrological predictions had been of any help to him. Constantine became the rightful emperor of the West. And in 313, along with his co-ruler in the East, Licinius, he issued the Edict of Milan, ending all persecutions of Christians and restoring to them all their property. Thus the era of the martyrs came to an end. In 323 Constantine became emperor of the East, as well.

He became a catechumen, but out of reverence for the sanctity of the sacrament of baptism the emperor delayed receiving the sacrament until just before his death. In the meantime he did a great many good works, a few of which we will describe presently. Sensing his impending death, Constantine received baptism on the day of Pentecost. Then, while still in his white baptismal robe, he departed to Christ on May 21, 337. The Church canonized him as an equal to the apostles. And indeed, in all of history there has never been a person through whose efforts so many people became Christians.

The holy equal-to-the-apostles Constantine is commemorated on **June 3**.

## THE CHURCH AND THE EMPIRE

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**N**ow that the holy equal-to-the-apostles Constantine had given the Church its freedom, a whole new chapter in its existence began. While preserving its readiness to meet the Kingdom of Christ, the Church entered into a union with the Roman Empire, thereby fulfilling the Lord's command to preach the Gospel to all creation. Orthodox Christians have always remembered that, as the Savior and the apostle Paul taught, the very concept of government was established by the Creator. Hence, they did not consider it disgraceful to cooperate with the imperial agencies. As the sainted emperor Justinian later wrote, "Divine Providence gave mankind two gifts: priesthood and kingship. Priesthood cares for man's soul, and kingship preserves the body. The perfect harmony [in the Greek, *symphonia*] of these two authorities preserves mankind."

This remained the guiding principle for the Church's existence for one and a half millennia—as a unified organism with two ruling bodies. At the same time, there was always an awareness that the natural governing bodies of kingship were inferior to the divinely-established apostolic hierarchy. "Priesthood is greater than kingship," said Saints John Chrysostom and Ambrose of Milan. Hence, it soon became the practice for the emperor's coronation to be performed by the patriarch. While always recognizing the right of the state to exercise its authority, the Church rejected the emperor's interference in solely ecclesiastical matters, particularly where this concerned the dogmatic teaching of Christians. Numerous martyrs and confessors defended this Divine freedom at the cost of their lives.

At the same time, the ennobling influence of the Orthodox Church gradually changed the very structure of the empire and society. Like leaven, the Gospel changed human society. Idolatry and gladiator battles disappeared, execution by crucifixion was abolished, and a new attitude towards slavery arose, leading eventually to its abolition. Worship of the triune Creator destroyed the nightmare of diabolical tyranny.

Thus God acted in history, and through the empire He raised up for Himself millions of the saved. For Him, all governments are merely instruments of His might, serving voluntarily or involuntarily for men's salvation. It is for this reason that the Orthodox do not agree with the Protestant declaration that after Saint Constantine the Church lost its purity, and the Bible likewise declares this impossible (Mt. 16:18).

## THE ARIAN HERESY

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After the persecutions ceased, the enemy of God, the devil, refused to admit defeat, and launched a new battle against the Church. He stirred up a storm of heresies within it, by which he intended to destroy Divine Revelation. One of the most terrible heresies that arose among the Christians was the heresy of Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria.

Even before he began composing his false teaching Arius had been cut off from the Church for instigating a schism. When Peter, bishop of Alexandria and a future martyr of Christ, wished to receive him back into the Church, in a vision he saw the Lord Jesus in a torn garment.

"Who has torn Your vesture?" Peter asked.

"It was Arius," the Lord replied.

Thus was his terrible work in the Church foretold. Saint Peter refused to accept the future heretic's repentance, but his successor Achillus took pity on Arius and restored him to the rank of priest. After Achillus' death, under Patriarch Alexander, tormented by envy Arius began to preach a new teaching.

He began to teach that Christ does not exist eternally with the Father, is not begotten of His essence, and is not true God, but is only the highest of the creatures that God created from nonexistence. Christ, he avowed, is not the only-begotten Son of the Father, but merely one of His adopted sons, Whom the Father chose, foreseeing His dedication to what is good. He supposedly could have sinned, but did not wish to.

This diabolical false teaching is maintained today by the sectarians who call themselves "Jehovah's Witnesses," and also by many occult sects. The same was taught by Leo Tolstoy. If this teaching had triumphed, nothing



would have been left of the Gospel itself. We would have lost our hope of union with God.

## THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, excommunicated Arius and his supporters. Arius, like the devil who caused the downfall of a third of the angels, won over a third of Alexandria's clergy, and not wishing to acknowledge his condemnation he went on to subject the other churches of the world to his blasphemy. The resulting confusion swept throughout the Church, and the emperor Constantine, moved by the Holy Spirit, commanded all the bishops of the world to convene at a council to examine the issue.

The council was held in the year 325 in the city of Nicaea (now the city of Iznik, Turkey). Three hundred and eighteen bishops assembled from all corners of the Christian world, after the number of Abraham's servants who crushed the forces of the kings of Mesopotamia (Gen. 14). Bishop Hosius of Cordoba (Spain) presided. Many saints were present at the Council: Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, Spyridon of Trimythous, Alexander of Alexandria, Macarius of Jerusalem, Eustathius of Antioch, James of Nisibis, and others.

These began asking each other how each of them preserved the apostolic teaching. It soon became clear that the teaching of Arius was foreign to the Tradition of the apostles. The Arians attempted to confuse the issue with philosophical arguments. But they were firmly opposed by the deacon Athanasius of the Church of Alexandria.

Finally the holy hierarch Spyridon went out and stood in the midst of the assembly.

Taking a brick he said, "Do you see this brick? It is one."

At that moment a flame shot skyward, water trickled down, and the hierarch was left holding a handful of clay—the three natures that had comprised the one brick.

"So God also is both Trinity and unity," the hierarch said.

Arius nevertheless continued resisting and blaspheming Christ. Finally the holy hierarch Nicholas, carried away by zeal, struck him on the mouth. For this act the fathers of the Council stripped Nicholas of his bishopric. But Christ and the Theotokos appeared to them, commanding them to restore him to his episcopal rank.

Finally, seeing the heretic's unrepentance, the fathers of the Council condemned him to excommunication (anathema), and laid out our Orthodox Symbol of Faith, up to the words "and in the Holy Spirit." They confessed the

Son of God to be begotten of the Father's essence before all ages, and of one essence with the Father. Furthermore, they decreed that all Christians were to celebrate Pascha on the same day (for there were still some who celebrated the feast together with the Jews). Likewise the fathers adopted twenty canonical rules regulating the life of the Church. For example, the 20th canon of this Council prohibits prostrations on Sundays and from Pascha until Pentecost.

Thus the Holy Spirit subdued heresy and established Orthodoxy. This was the first time the Church had convened in an assembly since the time of the apostles, and the Comforter again showed that it is He Who stands at the helm of the ship of the Church.

The holy fathers of the First Ecumenical Council are commemorated on the seventh Sunday after Pascha and on **June 11**.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

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This marks the beginning of the era of the Ecumenical Councils (of which there were seven)—the highest legislative authority of the Church on earth. As Christ taught, *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them* (Mt. 18:20), and the Lord Jesus is the Head of the Church. Hence, where the apostles' successors are gathered from all corners of the world, if they have the desire to preserve the original Revelation unchanged, Christ is invariably there in the midst of them. And the Holy Spirit, sent by the Heavenly Father in the name of Christ, as the Lord promised, abides with us forever and guides us into all truth (Jn. 14:16, 16:13). His life-creating action is clearly visible in the Ecumenical Councils.

Hence, we believe that those Ecumenical Councils that preserve the apostolic teaching are infallible, and their enactments are divinely inspired. They are like lighthouses, helping us to find our way through the sea of life with its numerous teachings and faiths. Conversely, one who violates an enactment of even a single Ecumenical Council will perish (Mt. 18:17).

We see that the Councils never create any new teachings. Their purpose is to defend the Lord's Revelation intact. Hence, the opinion that any given Council introduced this or that new doctrine, or that this or that teaching must be abolished by an Ecumenical Council, is absolutely untenable. No! The faith has been given once and for all to the saints (Jude 2), and no one can add or subtract anything from it. At its Councils the Church preserves it and expresses it more precisely in order to defend it from the wiles of the heretics who distort the Word of God. Incidentally, it is for this same reason that no enactment of an Ecumenical Council can ever be abolished.

## HOLY HIERARCH NICHOLAS OF MYRA AND LYCIA

One of the most venerated saints of God in the whole Orthodox world is Nicholas, archbishop of Myra in Lycia (now Demre, Turkey). He shone forth in the Church in the early fourth century. Even in his youth Nicholas was renowned for his charitable works. In the city of Patara there lived a certain man who had three daughters. He was extremely poor, and decided to give his daughters over to fornication. Upon learning of this Nicholas secretly left him a purse of gold coins on three separate occasions under cover of darkness. Thus the father was able to give away his daughters in marriage.

By a miracle of God Nicholas was indicated to be bishop of Myra in Lycia. He endured the persecutions of Diocletian and spent considerable time in prison, but the Lord preserved him alive.



When the emperor Constantine declared peace to the churches, the holy hierarch had to refute the false teachings of the Arians and the Sabellians (who claimed that God the Trinity was a single Person), defending the Orthodox teaching of the equality of the three Persons of the Divinity. So great was his zeal that at the Council of Nicea he even stopped Arius' blasphemy with a slap in the face. The fathers of the Council decided to depose the hierarch, but in a vision during sleep seen by many members of the Council the Lord restored the Gospel book to Nicholas, and the Theotokos—his omophorion. Then the saint's clerical rank was restored to him.

Nicholas was a great contender for God's truth and a defender of all the oppressed. Once he learned that three generals had been slandered and sentenced to death. The hierarch ran out onto the field where the innocent men were to be executed, and saw that the executioner had already raised his sword. He tore the weapon from his hands and forced the judge to rescind the unjust sentence.

Another time he brought a shipload of grain to feed his hungry people by appearing in a dream to a merchant, giving him three golden coins as security.

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He was a great wonderworker. Once a ship sailing to Lycia was caught in a terrible storm. Then the sailors remembered their hierarch and cried out to him in prayer. And immediately they saw the saint, who encouraged them, took the helm, and guided the vessel until the storm abated.

He departed this life surrounded by the love of Orthodox Christians on December 6, 341, and was buried in Myra in Lycia. Later his relics were transferred to the city of Bari (Italy). His soul lives on with God, and to this day by his prayers he helps all those who call upon him. A countless sea of miracles is performed through his prayers to this day. And all who are in need of help may easily be assured of swift aid from Nicholas.

The holy hierarch Nicholas, archbishop of Myra and Lycia, is commemorated on **December 19** and **May 22**.

## THE EXALTATION OF THE LIFE-GIVING CROSS

**T**he holy emperor Constantine long desired to find the holy Cross of Christ, recalling the sign that had appeared to him before the battle with Maxentius. He sent his mother, the empress Helena, to Jerusalem to find the Life-giving Tree of the Lord. When she came to Jerusalem she learned that the secret of the Cross had been preserved among the elders of the Jews. Then she arrested one of the elders, whose name was Judas. He was interrogated, after

which he showed her the place where they had flung the Holy Cross. It was an old cistern for water, not far from Golgotha.

In the cistern three crosses were found, along with nails and the inscription in three languages. But how were they to learn upon which of the crosses the Lord was crucified? Then, on the advice of Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem, it was decided to leave the matter to God. At that moment a bier holding a corpse was being carried out of Jerusalem, and they began laying the new-found crosses upon the body. Two of the crosses had no effect. But when the third was laid upon it, the dead man arose. Thus the true Cross was identified.

A crowd of people gathered, wishing to see the great Sacrificial Altar of the Redeemer. The Patriarch raised the Cross above the crowd, and the people cried out, “Lord, have mercy!” Thus was established the feast of the Exaltation of the Life-giving Cross of the Lord. The sacred Tree itself was divided into numerous pieces, which then filled the whole world.

Seeing the power of God, Judas was baptized with the name Cyriacus, and later became a Christian bishop. He was executed by the emperor Justinian the Apostate. (Saint Cyriacus is commemorated on **October 28**.)

The Exaltation of the Cross is one of the twelve great feasts of the Church, and is celebrated on **September 27**. It is a day of fasting, for on it we recall the death of Christ the Savior.

## THE CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

**A**fter the cessation of the persecutions the emperor Constantine began developing the holy places connected with the life of Christ and the apostles. Throughout the cities of the empire the construction of majestic churches was begun. Saint Peter’s Basilica was built in Rome, and the Hagia Irene (Saint Irene) cathedral was erected in the newly-built Constantinople. But it was to Palestine that the sainted emperor gave particular attention. He sent his mother, the empress Helena, to erect temples at the sites of sacred history. Saint Helena erected majestic churches in Bethlehem, over the cave of the Nativity, and on the Mount of Olives, at the site of Christ’s Ascension, and on Tabor, at the site of the Transfiguration. In Jerusalem the pious empress particularly wished to find the Holy Cross and the Lord’s Tomb.

The pagans, wishing to defile the sites linked with the Lord’s name, had built a temple to Venus—the goddess of wantonness—on Golgotha, and over the life-giving Tomb they had erected a statue of Jupiter. At the empress’s command the idols were torn down. Excavations located the Holy Tomb and,

lying beside it, the stone upon which the angel of God had sat following the Lord's Resurrection.

Over the newfound holy sites a majestic temple was erected, called the Martyrium ("Witness to the Resurrection"), which became the model for all the Orthodox churches of the world. In the year 335 it was consecrated by a council of bishops.

Since that time the Orthodox have revived the tradition of pilgrimage to the holy places, which was commanded in Old Testament times. A pilgrimage is not mere tourism. It is a special labor, combined with prayer, repentance, and charitable works. The experience of the Church has shown that a pious pilgrimage frequently changes a person's life, drawing to him the grace of God.

The feast of the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection is celebrated on September 26, and in the vernacular it is called Resurrection Day. In certain churches a paschal service is served on this day.

## HOLY HIERARCH ATHANASIOUS THE GREAT

As has been said above, one of Arius' chief opponents at the Council in Nicaea was the deacon Athanasius. Divine Providence appointed him the chief defender of Orthodoxy. In 328 he became bishop of Alexandria. Numerous pagans came to the Church through his labors. But the defeated Arians did not give up, and began weaving a web of intrigue. Athanasius became their primary target. Through their efforts the hierarch spent several decades in exile, yet he remained a pillar of Orthodoxy. He organized communications among the persecuted Christians and helped overcome schisms in the churches. He became the nerve center of the Orthodox world. There were times when it was remarked: "It's Athanasius against the world." And so it was. Yet the world proved the loser.

In all circumstances the hierarch maintained unshaken trust in God, fearing nothing. Once the Arians accused the saint of murder and magic. For this purpose they found a certain schismatic bishop, Arsenius, whom they hid, then took a dead hand and claimed that Athanasius had worked magic with the hand. During the trial the saint's supporters discovered the allegedly murdered Arsenius, and Athanasius brought him to court. At the moment when the question of the murder was raised, Athanasius commanded Arsenius to show both his hands.

"Where might a person grow a third hand?" he asked those assembled.

But despite the proven slander the false court condemned the saint, and he was forced to take refuge in the West.



Another time the Arians attempted to seize Athanasius in the church during the vigil, but he hid from them by mingling with the parishioners who were singing psalms. Hiding in the swamps near the city he wrote an epistle denouncing the heretics.

The emperor Julian, who had returned to paganism, gave orders for Athanasius to be secretly executed. Upon learning of this the saint embarked on a ship and sailed up the Nile. Before his departure he comforted the Christians, saying, “Do not weep, children; this cloud will soon pass!”

After sailing up the river he suddenly ordered that the ship be turned around to meet the assassins, who drew even with his ship.

“Have you seen Athanasius?” they asked him.

“He is sailing a little ways in front of you,” Athanasius himself replied. “Hurry, and you will catch up with him.”

Thus he escaped the killers on this occasion as well, preserved by the mercy of God.

The saint lived to great old age, guiding the Church of Egypt for 47 years, of which 20 were spent in exile. Upon his frail shoulders God preserved Orthodoxy. His life shows that one must fight for the truth of the faith. It is through these kinds of martyric feats of faith that the Holy Spirit preserves the Church infallible. On May 2, 373, Saint Athanasius departed to the Immortal Trinity, Whom he had defended throughout his life against the incursions of the heretics.

We celebrate the memory of Athanasius the Great on **May 15** (the day of his repose) and on **January 31**.

## VENERABLE ANTHONY THE GREAT AND THE BIRTH OF MONASTICISM

When many pagans joined the Church, there arose the danger that the Kingdom of God would become mingled with the heathen world. In order to prevent this the Holy Spirit established a special service in the Church: monasticism, which prevented Christianity from dissolving in the elements of the world. Its progenitor became Anthony the Great. He was an Egyptian and a wealthy landowner.

Once he went into a church and heard the Lord's words: *If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor* (Mt. 19:21). Then Anthony immediately sold his estate and became a monk. First he studied under experienced elders, then he departed to labor ascetically in the pagan sepulchers. There the devil and his demons repeatedly attacked him, attempting to force



him to abandon his path. Once they beat him, leaving him half dead, but even then the saint did not give up the fight. Then, in the heat of the battle, suddenly a celestial light illumined the saint, and Christ healed all his wounds.

“Where were You?” Anthony cried.

“I was always here,” the Lord replied, “but I waited, wishing to see your courage and your victory. And since you have stood your ground I will always be your Helper and will make you renowned in every place.”

After this Anthony settled in the remote Thebaid wilderness (a spur of the Sahara), near the Red Sea. Around him many disciples gathered, so that the wilderness turned into a city. God endowed Anthony with many gifts—prophecy, miracle working, and the ability to see spirits.

When in 346 the Arians attempted to depose Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, at the command of the Holy Spirit Anthony left the wilderness and declared before a multitude of people that God was with Athanasius.

He converted many people from paganism to Christianity. Since that time missionary work has been one of the ministries of monks. Their chief work, however, remains overcoming the passions and praying for the whole world. When people avow that monks are idle, they forget that the very existence of our universe depends on whether or not there are people in it who strive for the heights of godlikeness.

Saint Anthony reposed in 356, commanding in his humility that his body be buried so that none might find it but Christ, on the day of the Second

Coming. But his labors produced the great work of monasticism, which to this day preserves inviolate the original mystery of Christianity, the mystery by which the Church, in the words of our contemporary Saint Justin (Popovich, †1979), is called a workshop in which God makes gods out of men.

Saint Anthony the Great is commemorated on **January 30**.

## SAINT BASIL THE GREAT

In the fight against the heresy of Arius that had arisen the Church produced three holy hierarchs whose theology became the model for Orthodox Christians. The first of these was Basil the Great (330–379). He was born of pious parents, and his entire family is numbered with the ranks of the saints. Being brilliantly educated (he graduated the Academy of Athens) Basil decided to dedicate his entire life to service to God, and to this end he visited the monasteries of Egypt. Then Basil left for Jerusalem and received baptism in the Jordan, after which together with his friend Gregory the Theologian he founded a series of monasteries in Capadocia, for which he wrote a rule which became the basis for subsequent Orthodox monastic life. By this time he had been ordained to the rank of presbyter, and he became renowned for his sermons, in which he expounded on the teaching regarding the creation of the world (*On the Hexaemeron*), gave his commentaries on Holy Scripture (*Talks on the Psalms and on the Prophet Isaiah*), and gave numerous lessons on moral living.

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But there came a time when God led the saint out of the wilderness. The council of bishops of Capadocia ordained Basil bishop of Caesarea. Then the saint revealed his zeal in defense of Orthodoxy. In numerous works he demonstrated the Divinity of the Son and the uncreatedness of the Holy Spirit. Through his theological works the Arian teaching was crushed in the Eastern Church, and the faith of the Nicene Council was reestablished.

Once an Arian ruler demanded in the name of the emperor that the hierarch sign a heretical confession of faith. To this Basil replied, “How can I, a creature called to become a god, worship a creature?”

Then the ruler said that he would punish the hierarch.

“This you cannot do!” he replied.

“Why not?” the heretic asked in surprise.

“You cannot take away my property, because I own only the clothes on my back, and a few books. You cannot exile me, because I have no homeland on this earth, and everywhere I am a sojourner and a stranger (Ps. 38:13). You cannot torture me, because I am so weak that I will die at the first blow. For me death is deliverance, because it will unite me with God.”

“No one has ever spoken so boldly to me before!” said the astonished ruler.

“Apparently you have never before had to deal with a bishop,” replied Basil.

Saint Basil the Great possessed a great gift of prayer, as witnessed by the rite of the Divine Liturgy which he composed. This Liturgy is served ten times a year, on the most solemn days. In it is clearly reflected the power of the Holy Spirit, which guided the holy hierarch. When he first prayed in these words, the worshipers in the temple saw a celestial light illumining the altar, and angels surrounding the saint. Another time a certain Jew saw how during Basil’s prayer the angels brought to him the Divine Infant, of Whose Flesh and Blood the Christians were communing.

In addition to prayer, however, Basil was adorned by great works of mercy. He built a hospital for the poor, and during a famine he fed thousands of those in need. He likewise defended the simple folk, such as a widow who was mistreated by a ruler.

For eight years Basil guided the Church of Caesarea, and during this time through his tireless labors many of the heretics returned to faith in the Holy Trinity. When the time of his end arrived he even turned his deathbed illness to the benefit of his fellow man. His physician was a Jew who was so skilled in medicine that he could exactly predict the time of a patient’s death. This man told Basil that he would die by sunset.

“What if I live until morning?” the hierarch asked him.

“Then I will be baptized,” replied the Jew.

Saint Basil prayed, and in the morning he went to the church and baptized his physician himself, who glorified the power of Christ. Then he served the Liturgy, and after giving an exhortation he departed to the Lord on January 1, 379.

The holy hierarch is commemorated on **January 14**.

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## SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN

As has been said, a close friend of Basil the Great and himself a great holy hierarch was Gregory the Theologian. It was said of them that they were “a single soul living in two bodies.”

Even before his birth Gregory’s mother consecrated him to God. In his youth he decided to preserve his virginity, after having a vision in which he saw two heavenly virgins—Chastity and Purity—who said to him: “Be of one mind with us, unite your mind to ours, and make your face like our own [i.e., modest—*Auth.*]. Then we will raise you up to the heavens, shimmering

with inconceivable brilliance, and set you beside the all-great brilliance of the Trinity.”

Having received a good education, Gregory was baptized together with Basil, and lived in solitude, to which he longed to return to the end of his days. His father, however, who was a bishop, elevated him to the rank of priest so that he could assist him. Then Saint Basil ordained him bishop of a certain village (Sasime). But Gregory did not wish to compete for the episcopal throne, a risk which he faced in the event of taking the see, and he fled back to solitude.

But Divine Providence led him to another service. The council of bishops asked the hierarch to go to Constantinople, where for some time there had been no Orthodox bishop, and Arianism reigned unchallenged.

Upon arriving in the capital Gregory learned that not a single church remained to the Orthodox. Then he began serving in a house church, which he called Anastasia (i.e., “The Resurrection of Orthodoxy”). By his excellent sermons, which to this day are a model of Christian theology, the hierarch disproved the evil-mindedness of the heretics. Many of those who had gone astray he converted to the knowledge of God. Then the heretics attempted to kill him, throwing stones at him and even sending assassins, but God preserved His saint. Gregory responded to these attacks with still more exalted theology, grounded in his own experience.

“No sooner do I glance at the One, than the Trinity illumines my mind!” he exclaimed, irradiated with heavenly brilliance.

Another temptation that befell the saint was betrayal by those close to him. Gregory took the philosopher Maximus under his wing, who through bribery suddenly became bishop in the saint’s stead. But this unlawful ordination was later rejected by the Church.

On numerous occasions Gregory wished to withdraw into solitude, but the Christians said, “In leaving Constantinople you take the Trinity with you!”

At that time the Orthodox emperor Theodosius ascended the throne, and transferred all the churches in the capital to the saint. Soon the Second Ecumenical Council was convened, at which the saint’s appointment to the rank of patriarch was confirmed. But during the session several bishops began to protest his appointment. Then Gregory cried, “If I am the cause of discord I am no better than the prophet Jonah! Throw me over the side of the ship, that the storm may be quelled; only make peace among you and be of one mind, believing in the Holy Trinity!”

After this the saint retired to his estate, where he abode in contemplation of the mysteries of the Divinity, and soon reposed. The Holy Church honored him with the exalted title of “theologian,” as a man who had contemplated the greatest mysteries of the Life-creating Trinity.

Saint Gregory the Theologian is commemorated on **February 12**.

## THE SECOND ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Through the works of the great hierarchs and saints Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, and Gregory the Theologian the Church began to overcome the heresy of Arius, which though condemned in Nicaea had seized the minds of many Christians. But by the machinations of the devil this rotten root gave rise to other errors.

Macedonius of Constantinople began teaching that the Holy Spirit was a creation of God, and that He is not the Creator Who sanctifies us, but a creation. Meletius of Ancyra taught that the Kingdom of Christ would end during the Second Coming, and that the Lord Himself would disappear in His Father. Appolinarius of Laodicia denied the authenticity of the Divine Incarnation, teaching that Christ had only a Divine mind, and not a human one. This implied that God rejected man's highest part—his reason. In addition, Appolinarius resurrected the Jewish heresy concerning the thousand-year reign of the righteous, who would allegedly delight in fleshly pleasures. This false teaching is called millennialism, and it has recurred on numerous occasions in various sects, of which the best-known is communism.

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To overcome these errors, in 381 the emperor Theodosius convened one hundred and fifty bishops at the Council of Constantinople. Present there were the great saints Meletius of Antioch, Gregory the Theologian, and Nectarius of Constantinople, who presided at the sessions of the Council. The fathers of the Council rejected all the heresies, extending the Nicene Symbol of Faith to include the teaching concerning the Holy Spirit as God, the incarnation and eternal Kingdom of Christ, the properties of the Church, and the hope of the Resurrection. Since that time this Creed has been used universally in all Orthodox churches. The Council adopted seven canons governing Christian life, and condemned all the heresies that were arising.

The Holy Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council are commemorated on **June 4**.

## HOLY HIERARCH JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

After the triumph of Orthodoxy over Arianism peace reigned for a time in the Church. And God raised up a great preacher and teacher of piety: John, archbishop of Constantinople.

He was pupil of the great pagan orator Libanius, but converted to Christianity and became a zealous ascetic. In Antioch of Syria he was ordained a



priest and gained renown as a superb preacher. During his sermons merchants would leave their stalls and run to the church. The streets would be deserted. His sermons were met with ovations from his enthralled listeners, who even surnamed him “Chrysostom” (“Golden-mouthed”). His chief idea was to implement the Gospel standards in the world, which had only recently been freed from paganism. John believed that the existence of a gulf between rich and poor in the Christian community was contrary to the standards of God’s Word, and consequently it was essential for all those who possessed wealth to support the poor to the utmost, so that not a single destitute person would remain among the Christians.

He gave commentaries on many books of Holy Scripture, and his commentaries became models for the Orthodox Church. While still archbishop of Constantinople his disciple Proclus saw how, as he was writing commentaries on the epistles of the apostle Paul, the apostle himself spoke into his ear, dictating the meaning of his own words.

Upon learning of John, the emperor Arcadius and the council of bishops resolved to elect him to the vacant see of Constantinople. When this became known in Antioch the people did not wish to release their pastor, and the archbishop-elect had to be secretly spirited away by the emperor’s emissaries.

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After his ordination (in 398) John increased his efforts, healing the spiritual illnesses of both rich and poor by the Word of God. To aid the poor he established numerous hospitals and organized charitable work, so that numerous unfortunates received aid from him. In addition to caring for their bodies, the hierarch also cared for the souls of his flock. By his efforts the influence of Arianism among the capital’s inhabitants weakened. To this end he held solemn church processions with hymns glorifying Christ, and assembled the people for nocturnal services. Saint John compiled an order of the Liturgy that became the primary liturgy in our Church and is served nearly every day.

Through envy, however, Saint John acquired many enemies, who were vexed by the hierarch’s preaching. He was accused of pride for not holding parties and for deposing priests and even bishops unworthy of their ranks who had been ordained through bribery. He was particularly hated by Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, who feared he would be punished for his misdeeds.

With the help of the empress Eudocia, who was “offended” by the saint’s sermons, Patriarch Theophilus assembled a false council at the villa Epi Dryn (“Beneath the Oak”), near Chalcedon, in 404. John and a council of bishops faithful to him (of whom there were more than at the false council) demanded that his enemies be removed from the case, at which point he would agree to submit to the decision. But his opponents found this undesir-

able. They condemned John for failing to appear at the council, and stripped him of his see in absentia.

The emperor commanded that the saint be exiled, but the people rebelled, and that night a terrible earthquake occurred. The emperor was frightened and retracted his decision, and John once again took the see.

But after a second conflict with the empress, who took the archbishop's accusatory preaching personally, John was exiled to Armenia. When he learned of the decision he told his supporters, who were weeping at his exile: "Do not weep. The Church did not begin with John, nor will it end with John. Submit to whichever bishop is elected in my place according to the church canons, not at the order of the rulers."

After his exile the chief temple in the capital—Hagia Sophia, the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom—was destroyed in a fire. This was a sign of God's wrath against the workers of iniquity. In exile John preached the Word of God to the pagans, of whom a great many accepted Christianity.

Upon learning that the saint's influence had not weakened, the empress demanded that he be sent to the most desolate place possible: to Pityus (Pitsunda). The apostles Peter and John appeared to Saint John and announced to him that he would soon go to meet the Lord. Along the way the convoy abused the saint, who endured all these mockeries with humility despite his worsening illness. By the time they reached the city of Komana (not far from Sukhumi in Abkhazia) the saint's illness had left him completely exhausted. He spent the night at the Church of the Holy Martyr Basilisk, who was killed in Komana in 304.

That night Saint Basilisk appeared to him and said, "Take courage, Brother John! Tomorrow we will be together!"

The next day was the feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross. The saint vested in bright garments, served the Divine Liturgy, and after Communion, having blessed all that were present, he died with the words, "Glory to God for all things!"

This occurred in 407, when the saint was 60 years old.

Many bishops spoke out in Chrysostom's defense, particularly Pope Innocent of Rome. But the emperor did not wish to listen to their exhortations. God's punishment overtook many of John's enemies, showing the Lord's displeasure at the righteous one's persecution by those who, though Orthodox, did not keep the commandments. On January 27, 438, the saint's relics were transferred to Constantinople, and the emperor Theodosius asked forgiveness for the sins of his parents before the saint's incorrupt body.

Saint John Chrysostom is commemorated on the day when he was first exiled, **November 26**, and also on **February 9**, the day of the translation of his relics, since the day of his repose falls on the great feast of the Exaltation of the Cross.

## THE THIRD ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

Some time after the repose of John Chrysostom the emperor ordered that a priest named Nestorius from Antioch, who was renowned for his ascetic life, be placed on the throne of Constantinople. However, time proved his zeal to be of the mindless sort. No sooner had he ascended the throne than he said to the emperor, “Cleanse the Church of heretics and I will give you victory over the Persians.”

He attempted to uproot false teachings not in a spirit of meekness and patience, but by merciless persecutions against those who dissented from Jesus’ teachings. But soon he himself distorted Divine Revelation. Nestorius began to teach that our Lord Jesus Christ was a mere man, in whom God the Son abode as in a temple. Hence, the Virgin Mary ought not to be called “Theotokos,” but only “Anthropotokos” or “Christotokos.” This teaching, which demoted the Only-begotten Son of God to the level of one of the prophets, distorted the very mystery of our salvation. For only the Creator can wrest His creation from the bonds of death.

This false teaching met with fierce protest in the Church, and the fight against it was led by Saint Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria (412–444, commemorated June 22). He was a highly-educated man and a leading expert in Scripture, an author of many church hymns (including the hymns of Great Friday), and an ascetic in his personal life.

Cyril began by writing to Nestorius, attempting to convince him to abandon this new heresy, but the latter flatly refused, accusing the patriarch of Alexandria himself of heresy. Then Cyril convened a council of the bishops of Egypt, condemned the heretic, and appealed to the pope of Rome, Saint Celestine (432, commemorated April 21), to condemn the new teaching. The pope immediately supported the hierarch and demanded that Nestorius recant. The heretic for his part likewise assembled his supporters and condemned the teaching of Saint Cyril. Then the emperor Theodosius the Younger commanded that an Ecumenical Council be held in Ephesus.

Two hundred fathers traveled to Ephesus in the summer of 431 and awaited Nestorius and his supporters, but they absented themselves from the proceedings. Then the fathers led by Saint Cyril, gathered in the Church of the Most-holy Virgin, condemned Nestorius, and confirmed that Mary is truly the Theotokos, for she gave birth in His human nature to Him Who is the Eternal God the Son. They likewise adopted eight canons and confirmed the steadfastness of the Nicene Creed.

But Nestorius’ supporters, led by Patriarch John of Antioch, rejected the decision of the Council and condemned Saint Cyril. The emperor, to whom

it was reported that the bishop of Alexandria supposedly had deliberately disobeyed his order, ordered that Cyril be arrested along with Nestorius and that Ephesus be cordoned off. Then one of the Orthodox monks disguised himself as a beggar, and in a hollowed-out staff brought the decision of the Council of Ephesus to the capital, where he gave the document to the clergy of Constantinople.

Saint Cyril evaded arrest, and continued the fight for Orthodoxy from Alexandria. In 435 he was reconciled with John of Antioch, but to the end of his days he continued to polemicize with the teaching of Nestorius.

The heretic himself was exiled to an oasis in the desert, where he developed cancer, and worms ate his tongue. Thus perished the one who had blasphemed the Theotokos. Unfortunately, however, the Nestorian heresy drew with it many of the Christian communities of Iran and Central Asia. To this day this false teaching is maintained by the so-called Church of the East, or the Assyrian Church.

The Holy Fathers of the Third Ecumenical Council are commemorated on **September 22**.

## THE MONOPHYSITE HERESY AND THE FOURTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

**A**fter the repose of Saint Cyril a new heresy arose in the Church. The rector of one of the monasteries of Constantinople, Archimandrite Eutyches, began to teach that Christ had not two natures, but one. In the incarnation His Divinity had swallowed up his Humanity, as the ocean absorbs a drop of fresh water.

If this were so, we would be incapable of being saved. For then the very sufferings of the Lord would have been foreign to us. And we would be incapable of uniting with God without being destroyed.

At a Local Council in 448 Saint Flavian of Constantinople attempted to show Eutyches the error of his ways, but he persisted, and was excommunicated from the Church. However, while refusing to accept Orthodoxy, Eutyches succeeded in winning over the Alexandrian patriarch Dioscorus, and convinced the emperor Theodosius that Flavian had revived the Nestorian heresy.

In 449 a council was held in Ephesus (which came to be known as the “Robber Council”), at which Dioscorus behaved like a tyrant. He did not permit the Orthodox epistle of Saint Leo of Rome to be read, and declared Eutyches’ teaching to be Orthodox. Flavian of Constantinople attempted to de-

fend the faith, but Dioscorus did not allow him to speak. At his signal heretic monks burst into the church where the council was being held and began to beat the bishops, so severely that Flavian died on the third day.

The monks' leader Barsumas cried out, "Kill them! Cut to pieces those who acknowledge two natures in Christ!"

The frightened bishops signed blank pages, which Dioscorus filled out with a condemnation of Flavian and a confession of heresy. Only the pope of Rome's representative, the deacon Hilarius, cried out, "I protest!" Soldiers led him out of the crowd of maddened heretics and he fled to Rome by a secret route.

Upon learning what had happened Pope Leo rejected the false council and demanded that the emperor hold a free Council in Italy. But as long as the emperor Theodosius was alive the impiety of the heretics could not be restrained.

During that time the West alone preserved Orthodoxy. Theodosius soon died after falling from a horse, and the Orthodox Marcian ascended the throne. In 451 he convened the Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon. In attendance were six hundred and thirty fathers, including Saint Anatolius of Constantinople, Eusebius of Dorylaeum, Maximus of Antioch, and Juvenal of Jerusalem.

Dioscorus and Eutyches were condemned. All the bishops confessed the faith that Christ is the One Son, the One Lord, True God and true man, known in two natures, united unfused, unchanging, indivisible, and inseparable. The Council also compiled thirty rules and gave the patriarch of Constantinople the second place in the Church after Rome.

When the heretics doubted the rightness of the decision, the fathers of the Council prayed, then placed both the Orthodox and the heretical confessions of faith into a reliquary containing the relics of the holy martyr Euthymia, which they then sealed. In the morning upon opening the relics they saw the Orthodox confession lying on the martyr's breast, and the heretical confession trampled beneath her feet. Thus the truth of the faith was confirmed by a sign from heaven.

Though the Council of Chalcedon was ratified both by God and by the multitudinous assembly of bishops, unfortunately the heretical monophysites (from the Greek for "one nature") did not subside. They strangled Saint Proterius of Alexandria along with many other martyrs in the baptistry, and seduced several nations to the monophysite falsehood.

To this day the monophysite heresy is maintained by the Armenians, the Copts (Egypt), the Syrians, and the Malabar in India. For these nations this terrible heresy has become the standard of national validation.

The holy fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council are commemorated on **July 29**.

## THE HOLY EMPEROR JUSTINIAN AND THE FIFTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

**T**he greatest of the rulers of Constantinople was Saint Justinian (527–565). He freed the occupied lands of the West—Italy, Tunisia, and Spain—from the power of the Goths. Under his direction a beautiful Orthodox church was built in Constantinople: the Hagia Sophia, which since that time has served as a model for churches throughout the world. When the church was consecrated Justinian cried out, “Solomon, I have surpassed you!”

The Roman Orthodox emperors did not wish for multitudes of their subjects to perish over the monophysite heresy, particularly since the heretics were not above treason and treachery toward the Orthodox kingdom. Some rulers attempted to reach a compromise regarding the faith, but the Orthodox of both West and East rebelled against this idea. Others attempted to explain to the heretics that only the faith of the Council of Chalcedon properly expounded the teaching of God without leaning toward the heresy of Nestorius. In the meantime these heretics also attempted to declare their teaching to be the Chalcedonian faith, citing the legacy of Theodore of Mopsuestia and several works of Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa, which had not been examined at the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

At the same time in Palestine a series of monasteries fell prey to the false teaching of Origen (who died in 251) and his disciples Didymus the Blind and Evagrius Ponticus. The heretics claimed that the world was not created in six days, but had always existed; that our souls precede our bodies and become incarnate in punishment for sin; that in the resurrection we will receive not our own bodies, but something new, and that later we will become pure spirits; and that man is capable of achieving absolute equality with Christ. Thus paganism infiltrated the Church, and it had to be cut off.

Seeing such an upheaval in the churches, in 551 the emperor Justinian convened the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, with a hundred and sixty-five fathers. The compositions of Theodore of Mopsuestia were examined, and the fathers indignantly anathematized their author, though he was already dead. For he had been a true humanist, claiming that Christ was an ordinary man who communed with God, who overcame sin in himself and only after the Resurrection attained perfection. Theodore rejected the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning Christ and a number of books of the Bible (Job and the Song of Solomon). All these views were condemned by the Council. Also rejected were the epistles of Theodoret of Cyrus, directed against Saint Cyril, and the epistle of Ibas to Mari the Persian. The fathers of the Council confirmed that Jesus Christ’s personality is Divine, and that it received human nature into itself without fusion. In Him there were no



passions (sinful habits), and he had no need of perfecting Himself morally; rather, He Himself made us perfect.

The Council likewise condemned the false teachings of Origen, Didymus, and Evagrius. The world was created by God, and has not always existed. The soul appears together with the body, will be resurrected together with it, and will live eternally. Man will never attain equality with the Endless God. Thus we are taught by the Holy Fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

The Church commemorates the holy fathers of the Fifth Ecumenical Council on **August 7**. The holy emperor Justinian is commemorated on **November 27**.

## THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE WEST

**I**n the fourth and fifth centuries the hordes of the Goths seized the Western Roman Empire. These were either pagans or else adhered to the Arian heresy. Then the Roman Church sent missionaries to them, who converted them to Christ. In the second century Christianity had already found its way to Spain, Gaul (France), South Germany, and Britain. But it was after the fall of the empire in 476 that the Light of Christ began to shine with particular energy. Saint Severinus converted the Austrians. Through his spouse, Saint Clotilde, the mighty King Klodvig of the Franks was baptized. Then the Roman missionaries led by Saint Augustine of Canterbury baptized the Angles and the Saxons.

Even before their arrival, however, God sent to Ireland one of the greatest preachers of all time: Saint Patrick. He had originally been a slave in Ireland, but was later freed from captivity, and after being ordained bishop he voluntarily returned to his former masters.

In Ireland there was a custom that on the day of the autumn feast of the dead (now known as Halloween) all the fires were extinguished until the pagan druid priests had lit the sacred fire in the capital, Tara. Anyone who lit a fire earlier was to be put to death. On that terrible night Patrick came to Tara, and on a high neighboring hill he lit an enormous bonfire, symbolizing the Light of Christ. The maddened druids wanted to kill the saint, but the fire did not touch him. Then Patrick began proclaiming the Holy Trinity to all, demonstrating this mystery using the example of a shamrock. At his command all the snakes left the island, and to this day not a single creeping thing lives there. Astounded by his miracles, the people converted to the Lord. The Irish strove so mightily for holiness that their country came to be

called a holy island. A multitude of monasteries blanketed Ireland with holiness, peasants and kings alike joining the ranks of their brethren. The monks of Ireland spoke of three forms of martyrdom: red—death for Christ’s name; green—monasticism; and white—mission work in a foreign country. Hence, from Ireland and Britain numerous successors of the apostles went out to all Europe.

Through them, as well as the missionaries sent from Rome by Saint Gregory the Dialogist and his successors, in the seventh and eighth centuries Christianity was accepted in Germany, and in the tenth and eleventh centuries it made its way into Poland, Scandinavia, and even Iceland and North America.

By the beginning of the second millennium the only people in Europe who did not know Christ were the inhabitants of the Eastern Baltic (Finland, Lithuania, and the Polabian Slavs) and the Russian North.

The Lord granted the newly-converted Christians to bring a great many fruits of sanctity. This included pious monarchs (such as Saint Columban of Britain) and righteous hierarchs (Saint Augustine of Canterbury, Saint Ansgar, Saint Bonifatius), and pious kings (Saint Edward the Confessor, Saint Olaf of Norway). At that time Europe shone with the light of piety, though it also produced the deceitful Pneumatomachian heresy, which caused Europe’s downfall in 1054.

## MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR AND THE SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

**I**n 614 the Eastern Roman Empire suffered a terrible blow. The Iranian shah Khosrow seized Jerusalem, destroyed the holy places, and carried off the Holy Cross. Not until 14 years later was the Cross returned to Jerusalem. The emperor Heraclius himself carried the Life-giving Tree into the Church of the Resurrection, but an invisible force prevented him from ascending Golgotha until he had removed his royal regalia. Only then, barefoot and in humble clothing, did he ascend the mountain of our salvation.

In 626 the shah nearly took Constantinople. Only the intervention of the Theotokos saved the capital. Then in 628 Heraclius conducted a brilliant campaign against Iran, routed the Persians, and decided to reunite the monophysite heretics to the Church. For this purpose at the suggestion of Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople he offered them a compromise. He began teaching that though Christ existed in two natures He had only one will: the Divine. This false teaching is called monothelitism (“oneness of will”). Pope Honorius of Rome supported this heresy. Only Saint Sophronius of

Jerusalem spoke out against the new teaching. When the Moslem hordes attacked the Empire to the east in 637, and Jerusalem was taken, the sole defender of the true teaching in the Eastern Church was a disciple of Sophronius, Saint Maximus. He was secretary to the emperor, but later entered a monastery and devoted all his efforts to defending the patristic teaching concerning Christ as perfect both in His Divinity and in His Humanity. In Carthage Maximus defeated the former patriarch of Constantinople Pyrrhus, who for a time accepted Orthodoxy. Then in Rome he aided Pope Martin, and with his help in 649 the Lateran Council was held, consisting of one hundred and five bishops. The fathers of the Council condemned the new heresy and anathematized the founders of the false teaching.

The angry emperor Constantius arrested Pope Martin and Saint Maximus. Martin was condemned and exiled to Chersones (now a suburb of Sevastopol), where he died in prison on September 16, 655. The Church glorifies him as a confessor, and he is commemorated on **April 28**.

Thus Saint Maximus was left the sole defender of Orthodoxy in the East. Several times the heretic bishops and dignitaries of the emperor attempted to incline him to a compromise, but he answered thus: "The Holy Spirit condemns even angels who consent to anything contrary to what was preached (Gal. 1:8)! Even if the whole world should enter into communion with the heretics, I shall not!"

After lengthy torture his right hand was cut off, his tongue was torn out, and he was exiled to the Caucasus. Miraculously he retained the ability to speak.

On August 13, 662, the confessor died in prison. Before his death he was vouchsafed a vision of Christ. He is commemorated on **August 26** and **February 3**.

The saint's labors were not in vain, however. In 680–681 the Sixth Ecumenical Council was held in Constantinople. Present at the Council were a hundred and seventy-three holy fathers. They condemned monothelism and confessed that Christ had two natural wills that did not contradict each other, but rather the human will submitted in all things to the will of God.

The heresiarch patriarchs Honorius of Rome, Cyrus of Alexandria, Sergius of Constantinople, Pyrrus, Paul, and Peter were anathematized. One deluded monothelite priest declared that he had seen a vision confirming the heresy, and to prove it he was prepared to raise a man from the dead. He was given an opportunity to do so, but try as he might the heretic was unable to perform the miracle. He was invited to repent, but he refused and was excommunicated.

The dogma of the existence of two natural wills in Christ is of tremendous import. For if the Lord had not taken on our will we would have to destroy our own will to achieve our desire of uniting with God. This would

lead us to Eastern-style mysticism and destroy our hope of free adoption to the Father.

The holy fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council are commemorated on **February 5**.

## ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

While the Christian world was being lacerated by quarrels over Who our Savior is and what His nature is, from the deserts of Arabia there arose the terrible power of a new religion, which has since become one of the chief opponents of the Lord's teaching. In times of old Abraham's servant Hagar was told that her son Ishmael would be *a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him* (Gen. 16:12). This prophecy was fulfilled in a 46th-generation descendant of Ishmael—Muhammad.

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Muhammad was orphaned in childhood and raised by relatives. Later he married a rich widow. Though an idolater he was not content with worshipping the false gods that his parents worshiped, and desired to know the Creator. It is said that he knew the teachings of both Jews and Christians (most of them heretics), and decided that he could found a new religion. To this he was prompted by a revelation that he received from the other world.

Once while contemplating God Muhammad beheld an enormous spirit that began to choke him, forcing him to read a certain book. He refused, citing his illiteracy, but the torture continued until the wretch yielded and pronounced several words. Thus Muhammad received his vocation. After several doubts he decided that it was the archangel Gabriel that had appeared to him, sent by God to impart to him His Revelation. Gradually the seer began to amass supporters who believed him to be a messenger of God.

There were later revelations, as well, which, though less frightening, left him unconscious and caused him considerable suffering (his face would redden or pale, a bell would sound in his head, and his body would be covered in sweat). Muhammad's preaching, based on the revelations he received in this manner, came to be considered the eternally-existent word of God. The book in which they are compiled, the Koran, became the sole sacred text for Muslims, who rejected biblical Revelation.

Muhammad was rejected in his homeland, and so he went to the city of Medina, where he organized a religious community—a state which set itself the task of converting the entire world to the new faith. A series of wars began which continue to this day, as a result of which Arabia was left in the hands of the nomads, followed (after Muhammad's death) by an enormous part of the civilized world.

Muhammad had twelve wives, and legalized polygamy for his followers. Though during his life he was noted for his benevolence, he nevertheless hated all his opponents, killing them when the opportunity presented itself. Despite his status as a prophet he never made a single prediction that was accurately fulfilled. On the contrary, even death overtook him unexpectedly (in 632). However, in the Islamic world to this day he is revered as the greatest of God's messengers.

Islamic teaching is primitive in the extreme.

There is one infinitely distant Allah who created the world, angels, djinns, and men, and gave the law. He predetermined all things. He sends his messengers to demand that people worship him alone. The last of these was Muhammad. There will be a day of judgment when Allah will raise all men from the dead. The sinners he will cast into hades, where they will be given over to the most intricate tortures, while the righteous will enter paradise, where they will be met with physical pleasures of a gastronomic and sexual nature.

All people who have not accepted Islam are divided into two categories. The first are "people of the book" (Christians, Jews, and Sabians, who also revere the Creator, though incorrectly; they have a right to live on condition that they pay a special tax). The second category of non-Muslims are the pagans. These must either be forced to accept Islam or be killed. All soldiers who perish in Islamic war automatically enter paradise.

This is the force with which Christian countries had to reckon when many of their inhabitants preferred falsehood to the truth. It is no accident that Islam emerged successful at times when Orthodoxy weakened. This is the scourge of God upon those who apostasize from Christ. However, even among Muslims there were those who realized their error and accepted faith in Christ. Many of them are glorified as martyrs.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY?

Many people in our time see no difference between Islam and Christianity. They say, "We believe in the same God. The Muslims also revere Jesus, Mary, and the prophets; the only difference is in our rituals. These are two paths to the same God."

Nothing could be further from the truth. A person who dies a Muslim, who has not received holy baptism and has not been born of water and the Spirit, will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). If a person does not believe in the Son of God he will not see life; the wrath of God abides on him

(Jn. 3:36). After death his soul descends into hades, weighted down with the burden both of Adam's original defilement and of his own sins which God has not forgiven. Many of the saints have sorrowfully beheld Muhammad and his followers tormented in the fiery abyss.

In order to understand why God is so severe with Muslims we must turn to our primary sources—the Bible and the Koran—and examine whether Christians and Muslims serve the same God.

According to the Koran, Christians who say that Christ is the Son of God are an object of disgust: "That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth! ... How fain would they extinguish Allah's light with their mouths, but Allah will not allow but that His light should be perfected, even though the Unbelievers may detest (it)" (Koran 9:30, 32).

According to the Bible, *Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also* (1 Jn. 2:23). Thus, according to the Bible (which Muhammad requires people to hear—Koran 2:79 [85], 3:2 [3]), the Muslims are effectively godless, and the wrath of God abides on them (Jn. 3:36). They are condemned even before the Judgment, because they have not believed in the Only-begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:18) and they do not honor the Father who sent Him (Jn. 5:23).

It is apparent that when sacred books describe members of another religion in this way, the two faiths are simply mutually exclusive! One is right: either Christians or Muslims, not both. Here it should be taken into account that Muslims formally recognize the Bible (though they consider it distorted), but Christians have always rejected the Koran as being a record of Muhammad's false prophecy. For the manner in which Muhammad received his revelations can be explained in no other way than by demonic possession. Has even one of the true prophets ever received revelation in the way Muhammad did—experiencing terror and losing consciousness? Would the Creator really torture His creation? Only evil spirits behave this way. Not without cause have many noted the similarity between Muhammad's calling and the shamanic initiation rite.

The founder of Islam himself was convinced after the vision that an evil spirit had entered him, and that he had lost his mind. Nor did the spirit even attempt to persuade him otherwise. He did not calm Muhammad, as did the angels that appeared to Daniel, to Zechariah, and to the other prophets. Apparently this was a being that enjoyed frightening people.

The Orthodox fathers of the Church are well acquainted with such states. These are the states of spiritual delusion, terrible self-deception, compounded by possession by evil spirits. The Bible says that *Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers*



*also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness* (2 Cor. 11:14–15). Naturally, the product of the agency of fallen angels is incompatible with the true Revelation of the Creator.

The falseness of the Koran is made the more obvious to us if we recall the words of the Bible: *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed* (Gal. 1:8). And this is precisely what occurred: an angel of some kind came to an unbaptized man, claiming to be from God, and began preaching a teaching that contradicted both the Old and the New Testaments. This man, in no wise convinced that his teacher was actually sent by God, trusted him out of pride, and thus Islam appeared.

An essential question must however be asked: are the Allah of the Muslims and the God of the Christians one and the same person, or not? For not every being that calls itself God actually is.

Yes, in different languages the true God is called differently. Yes, the name *Allah* is a form of the Semitic *Elohim*—the name of God the Creator. Indeed, in pre-Islamic Arabia this was the name for the Creator of the world. But can we say that Allah is the God of the Christians?

The first obvious difference is that the Orthodox believe in the existence of one God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—not in three Gods, but in one, because all three Persons possess a single essence, a single will, a single authority and kingdom, and they have a single source of Divinity—the Father (Mt. 28:19). The Allah of the Muslims is solitary; he has not begotten and is not himself begotten. From this it is already clear that we believe in different Gods.

If however we contrast the traits of the God of the Christians and of Allah, we see that their descriptions are completely dissimilar. They are so different from one another that they cannot possibly be equated.

According to the Koran, Allah mocks those who have not believed, and deepens their delusion (Koran 2:14 [15]). He took away their light (Koran 2:16 [17]) and “sends astray whom he wills and guides whom he wills” (Koran 35:9 [8]. “But if Allah had willed, they would not have associated” [i.e., would not have equated Allah with other gods—*Trans.*] But he does not do this: “Thus does Allah leave astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills” (Koran 74:34). Thus, for Muslims Allah is the direct cause of all a person’s actions, both good and evil, yet at the same time he punishes a man for what he himself made him do. This behavior of the Muslim deity is indisputably amoral and tyrannical. He is “planning a scheme” (Koran 86:16), for “the best of planners is Allah” (Koran 3:47 [54]). He “deceives” (Koran 4:141 [142]). He changes his will (Koran 13:39). He is not omniscient (Koran 3:136 [142]).

If we compare him to the God of the Christians we see that they are fundamentally different. The true God *cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempt-*

*eth He any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed (Jas. 1:13–14). He is ... a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He (Deut. 32:4), for holy is the Lord (Ps. 98:9). The Lord says, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live (Ezek. 33:11), for God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:17), for God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? (Num. 23:19). He knoweth all things (1 Jn. 3:20).*

Thus, the Allah in whom the Muslims believe is tyrannical, unjust, not omniscient, scheming, and inconstant. This is a true idol, constructed in the mind of Muhammad—a parody of the true God. He in no way resembles the God of the Christians, Who is Love (1 Jn. 4:8), holy, just, unchanging, and omniscient.

Naturally, if we do not believe in the same God these two religions are incompatible.

Our faith in Jesus Christ also differs. For the Orthodox, Jesus Christ is the eternal God the Son, Who became man for our salvation. He is a single Person existing in two natures, true God and true man.

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For the Muslims, Jesus Christ is merely one of the prophets, distinguished from them only by His virgin birth from Mary.

The chief glory of Christians is the faith that by His Crucifixion on the Cross Christ redeemed us from sin, the curse, and eternal death, and by His Resurrection on the third day He gave resurrection to all of us likewise. We believe that Christ was raised to heaven in His resurrected body, and sits at the right hand of the Father, ruling the universe as a man. The Lord Jesus will return from the heavens to resurrect all the dead and to judge all according to their works.

The Muslims believe that Christ did not die; rather, Allah raised Him up to one of the lower heavens. He saved no one, and when He returns to earth He will have to die, though He will then participate in the Judgment of the resurrected. For the Muslims Muhammad is higher than Jesus Christ.

Christians know that the uncreated power of the Holy Spirit is poured into men through the sacraments, the first of which is baptism. A person is cleansed from the original death inherited from Adam, as well as from all his own personal sins. Salvation is accomplished not by a person's own merits, but by the grace of God, which is given in the sacraments and assimilated through faith and good works. A person is transfigured and becomes a son of God by grace.

The Muslims believe the human condition to be normal, and count on entering paradise through their works. They have rejected God's gift of baptism, and thus they remain in their sins. No one defends them from the devil,

and they have rejected the only path to the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). They do not believe in the possibility of adoption to God.

Christians revere the Virgin Mary as the Birthgiver of God, the Queen of Heaven, higher than the angels and archangels. She is our Intercessor before God, and we entreat her aid.

The Muslims consider the Virgin Mary one of the prophetesses. In his woeful ignorance Muhammad considered her the sister of the prophet Moses, who died 1500 years before Christ's birth. They do not consider her the Birthgiver of God. The Koran denies the mediation of the saints. Hence, Muslims do not pray to the Most-pure Virgin, though as a hold-over from Christianity in some places her aid is sought in times of illness.

Christians venerate the martyrs as the greatest of the saints, who for the sake of the name of the risen Christ went to their deaths, thereby showing the Lord's power. They are witnesses to the victory of the Son of God over death.

The Muslims revere as martyrs the *shahids*—those who in holy wars have killed those whom they considered unfaithful to Allah.

Christians venerate the holy Cross as the altar upon which our salvation was accomplished.

Muslims reject the Life-giving Tree and consider it an idol. In the lands they conquered they would often force Christians to remove the crosses from the churches. In place of this sign of victory over Satan they venerate the black stone in Mecca, believing it to be a petrified angel.

Christians are obedient to the successors of the apostles—the bishops and the priests—knowing that through them the Holy Spirit sanctifies the Orthodox. They believe that Christ, Who heads His Church, is Himself acting through the priests.

The Muslims, having no communion with the Creator, are proud of having no priests, and hence are dependent on the opinion of learned interpreters of the Koran.

The Orthodox await the Kingdom of Heaven, where the righteous will shine as the sun, and will see God, Who will be to them a Father, and they will be His children. Our chief joy lies in contemplation of God and union with Him.

Muslims await a crude, material paradise, where fleshly pleasures of an aesthetic, gastronomic, and sexual nature await them. With the exception of the Sufis, Muslims vehemently deny the possibility of being united with the Creator. Even the Sufis believe that upon meeting God the person himself disappears and is dissolved in Him.

Can two such diametrically opposed religions really be “two paths to the same destination,” as many say? No, here we must make a choice between the Revelation of God Himself, Who became man and saved us by His Blood, and the revelation of some spirit that has given its adepts nothing beyond a return to the oppression of the external law.

## THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

**I**n the 7th century the Church was seized by a new heresy: the heresy of iconoclasm. The emperors Leo the Isaurian and Constantine Copronymus declared icons to be idols, and began destroying them in all the churches.

In response to the preaching of this heresy, Saint John of Damascus (commemorated on December 17), who lived in Palestine, which at the time was under Arab rule, wrote his “Three Letters in Defense of the Holy Icons.” In these he indisputably proved, based on Holy Scripture (Ex. 25:19, 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23–28) and the works of the saints, that icons are not idols, but a witness to the Divine Incarnation, which are accorded veneration, not worship.

Upon learning of the saint’s courage the emperor Leo was enraged. He slandered him to the caliph (the Muslim ruler), who ordered that John’s hand be cut off. After this sentence was carried out John asked that his severed hand be given to him, and during tearful prayer before an icon of the Theotokos his hand grew back onto its former place. Thus God Himself confirmed the rightness of His saint.

For a long time the heresy held sway in the patriarchate of Constantinople. Orthodoxy was preserved in the Roman Church and in the Eastern Churches outside the Byzantine Empire. In the empire itself the chief bastions of Orthodoxy were the monks, upon whom a wave of persecutions descended. They were driven from monasteries, forced to marry, tortured, exiled, and executed.

When Saint Stephan the New was brought before the emperor Constantine Copronymus and ordered to trample an icon, he produced a coin bearing the image of the emperor.

“What would happen to a person who spat upon and trampled your image?” the saint inquired.

“He would be executed!” the iconoclast replied.

“What punishment then do you merit, you who have trampled the image of Christ, the King of kings?!” Stephan cried out, and trampled the image of the ungodly ruler underfoot.

At the emperor’s orders the saint was dragged through the streets of Constantinople and beaten to death. He is commemorated on **December 11**.

For a long time the persecutions continued. But at last the holy empress Irene came to power. She elevated Saint Tarasius to the patriarchal throne of Constantinople, and in 787 an Ecumenical council was held in Nicaea. Three hundred eighty-three holy fathers were present at the council, and iconoclasm was condemned.

It was decreed, in accordance with apostolic tradition, that the holy icons were to be honored, rendering veneration to the prototype, not to wood and paint. Nevertheless, this was to be a veneration of honor, not the God-befitting worship and service that we offer to the Creator alone.

We likewise honor relics, the Life-giving Cross, and other holy things, not considering them deities, but glorifying God Who in them has manifested His eternal glory. The council condemned all who rejected any part of the Tradition of the Church, and confirmed all the sacred canons (church laws) adopted by previous Councils and the holy fathers, which the Church observes to this day.

Some time after the Council iconoclasm again reared its ugly head, but it was condemned at the Council of 843, which established the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This feast is observed on the first Sunday of Great Lent. On that day the age-old faith of the Church is proclaimed, all distorters of Christ's teaching are given over to anathema (excommunication), and memory eternal is sung to all defenders of Orthodoxy.

The holy fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council are commemorated on the Sunday closest to **October 24**.

## THE PROTECTION OF THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

**I**n the early 10th century Constantinople was constantly threatened by enemies, both Muslims and the pagan Slavs. Once for this reason the citizens were assembled in the temple at Blachernae to serve a nighttime service. Praying there with them was a great saint of that time, Blessed Andrew the Fool for Christ (commemorated **October 2/15**). He possessed the gift of prophecy, and in order to avoid praise he pretended insanity. Suddenly during the divine service Andrew and his disciple Epiphanius saw the Theotokos. She was walking, shining with heavenly radiance, surrounded by angels and saints, along with John the Baptist and John the Theologian, toward the altar.

"Do you see the Lady and Mistress of the world?" Andrew asked Epiphanius.

"I do, my spiritual father," he replied.

In the meantime the Theotokos knelt before Her Son and asked Him to save the Christians. Then she removed her omophorion, or head covering, which was shimmering with heavenly light and of an amber hue, and with it covered all the worshipers, protecting them from the wrath of God. And the city was saved from the invasion of the barbarians.

In memory of this the Russian Church appointed the feast of the Protection of the Most-holy Theotokos on **October 14**. We ask that just as the Theotokos protected the Christians of Constantinople with her omophorion, she defend us also by her prayers from all enemies, visible and invisible.

## THE BAPTISM OF RUSSIA

Until the end of the first millennium after the Lord's coming Russia remained in the darkness of paganism. The Slavs worshiped demons and idols, having forgotten the Creator. But God remembered us and sent us the great saints Cyril and Methodius, who compiled the Slavic alphabet in Moravia and translated the Word of God and the services into our language. Thus began the conversion of the Slavs to Christ. First the Czechs accepted Christianity, followed by the Bulgarians, Serbs, and Poles. Finally the time of the Russians arrived.

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The first to convert to Christ was the holy princess Olga, who received baptism in Constantinople. Before accepting Christianity she had been cruel and vindictive, but after baptism she became renowned for her charity and her preaching of Christ.

Her grandson, the great prince Vladimir, baptized Russia. He had grown up a pagan and a murderer, and had a great many wives. The prince even killed the first Russian martyrs, John and Theodore. But the preaching of a wise philosopher who spoke of the Last Judgment caused him to rethink his life. Then Vladimir decided to send emissaries to various countries to learn whose faith was best. Upon returning the emissaries related how they had been in the Church of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia), and had not known whether they were on heaven or on earth. God is with the Orthodox, they said. God enlightened the spiritual eyes of the prince, and Vladimir received holy baptism.

On August 1, 988, at Vladimir's request all the inhabitants of Kiev came to the Dnepr and accepted the holy faith. Thus began the Baptism of Rus. The process did not go smoothly everywhere. At times the servants of Satan attempted to prevent it, but the prince and his successors overcame the enemy's resistance.

Vladimir himself underwent an amazing transformation after the sacred waters. He became a merciful prince, disinclined to execute even robbers. He was noted for particular charity toward the poor. On feasts the prince fed all the impoverished, sending food home to those who were ashamed to come. By his decree schools were opened, churches were built, and monasteries were founded. Thus this pagan country gradually became Holy Russia, in which holiness became the ideal.

Soon after the blessed repose of the holy equal-to-the-apostles Vladimir the Russian Church bore abundant fruits for Christ. The sons of the



baptizer of Rus', Boris and Gleb, went to their deaths rather than sully their hands with the blood of their brother. Less than a century after Russia's baptism, at the command of the Mother of God Saints Anthony and Theodosius established the Kiev Caves Lavra, which became the spiritual center of our church.

The holy equal-to-the-apostles Prince Vladimir is commemorated on **July 29**.

## THE FALLING AWAY OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

The enemy of the human race, the devil, did not wish to watch as the Church of Christ rapidly crushed his power among the nations and overcame all heresies. He devised a plan to destroy the first among the world's



churches in the same way that he, formerly the first among the angels, had himself fallen. For this purpose he incited a heresy in the West against the Holy Spirit, and thrust the bishop of Rome down into the abyss of pridefulness.

In the 6th century in Spain, as a means of combating Arianism, an amendment was made to the Symbol of Faith: ["We believe] in the Holy Spirit ... Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." This declaration, in Latin called the *Filioque* ("and from the Son"), added in violation of the conciliar prohibition against changing the Symbol of Faith, became the chief reason for the falling away of the West.

Many theologians of the time understood these words in Orthodox manner—that the Holy Spirit has His existence solely from the Father, as the Lord Himself says (Jn. 15:26), and is sent into the world by the Son to sanctify all by grace. But in the ninth century there arose a significant school of theology that taught that the Holy Spirit has His existence from the Father and the Son as from a single Source. This debased the third Person of the Holy Trinity, confusing grace with the One Who bestows it. The heretics began to teach that God has no uncreated energies that are bestowed upon creation, and that grace itself is a sort of higher creation. This destroyed the hope of Christians for deification as a union with God Himself by grace, making man a being independent of the Creator.

The Ecumenical Church reacted swiftly to this delusion. Saint Photius of Constantinople condemned the heresy. And in 881 in the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia representatives of all the churches along with Pope John of Rome prohibited distorting the Symbol of Faith.

Until the eleventh century the churches preserved a unified teaching. But the heresy had not been crushed, and its supporters began planning a reformation of the Western Church. They taught that the pope had absolute authority over the Church, and altered the Liturgy. Under the influence of the reformers the emperor of Germany seized Rome and appointed a heretical pope, who in 1014 for the first time introduced the distorted Symbol of Faith in Rome. This marked the beginning of the separation of the churches. The western church began serving using unleavened (yeastless) bread, since the reformers did not believe that the Body of Christ remained life-giving after His death.

In 1054 a decisive schism occurred between the Ecumenical Church and the West. Acting for Pope Leo IX, Cardinal Humbert excommunicated Patriarch Michael of Constantinople. The Council of Constantinople then excommunicated the cardinal from the Church. Thus began the lamentable separation that continues to this day.

The Roman Church was reformed as the heretics had wished. The pope began to be revered as the head of the entire Church, and he de-

manded that he be given absolute civil authority, as well. Later the Roman Church declared the pope to be infallible in doctrinal matters of faith and morality when teaching *ex cathedra* (“from the chair”). Thus man declared himself to be equal to God. Pride had seized the first among the world’s bishops.

Once they had begun changing Church Tradition, the Roman Catholics proved unable to stop. They introduced new dogmas: purgatory, in which a person allegedly pays for unredeemed sins; that the Theotokos was born without original sin; supererogation, or good works of the saints in excess of the amount required for salvation, which are transferred to the papal treasury and from there are distributed to those who lack sufficient good works (which gave rise to the practice of indulgences). The rites of the sacraments were also changed. Baptism began to be practiced by aspersion (sprinkling), and not by immersion, as the apostles had commanded. Chrismation began to be performed only after reaching adolescence, and thus children were deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit and of Communion. The Liturgy began to be served using unleavened bread, and the laity were given Communion only in the form of bread, contrary to the Lord’s words, *Drink ye all of it* (Mt. 26:27). Many other apostolic practices and dogmatic teachings were also distorted.

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Since the existence of the Orthodox Church was a living rebuke to these innovations, the Roman Catholics began to treat their brethren with aggression. This included outright wars, when the Romans seized Constantinople and the greater part of Eastern Europe, forcing Orthodox to accept their heresy. It included attempts to join the Orthodox to themselves through false unions. Many martyrs, their blood shed not by pagans but by their former brethren, went to shine in the firmament of heaven.

May the Lord then grant repentance to the Roman Church, that she may return to the infallible apostolic faith from which she fell.

## VENERABLE SERGIUS OF RADONEZH

**I**n the XIII–XIV centuries the Orthodox Church experienced difficult times. Constantinople was seized by the Roman Catholics, and though sixty years later the city was freed it was a blow from which Byzantium never fully recovered. Rus’ and Georgia were fractured and fell to the Mongols. It appeared that Orthodoxy was fated to become a tiny group of Eastern sectarians. But God willed otherwise. He sent the Church great saints, through whom the Church flourished to an unprecedented degree.



In Byzantium the holy hierarch Gregory Palamas and his disciples, who are often called the *hesychasts* (“silent ones”), defended the patristic teaching on uniting with God through the uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity against the onslaught of Western humanism. They taught that the Light of Christ manifested on Tabor is the actual radiance of the Divinity, and that it is accessible to any Christian. To achieve this one’s heart must be cleansed through prayer that unites the mind and the heart, and through works of Divine Love. A person who does this becomes a god by grace, and the eternal Life of the Trinity comes to abide in him here and now, and will reach its fullness after the world’s end. Thus a person achieves the Divine goal of his existence. This was the Church’s response to the challenge of the Renaissance-era West, which claimed man’s normal state to be one of autonomy.

In Russia the great work of restoring the spiritual state of the people was conducted by a number of saints, including the hierarchs of Moscow Peter and Alexis and the princes Alexander Nevsky and Michael of Tver.

A special place belongs to one of the most venerated of all Russian saints, Sergius of Radonezh (who was baptized Bartholomew).

The whole life of Sergius, who loved the Holy Trinity, shows how Providence acts in the fates of the saints. Even before his birth the Lord indicated his destiny when the infant cried out three times in his mother's womb. An angel helped the youth Bartholomew to learn his letters. His desire to serve the Creator led him to a dense forest, where as the newly-tonsured monk Sergius he established a monastery in honor of the Holy Trinity. Frequently the demons attacked him, but he overcame their wiles by prayer. The Spirit of God attracted even the beasts to Sergius, and he was frequently visited by a bear whom he fed by hand.

Gradually a brotherhood assembled, and the saint became the abbot of the monastery. Yet humility never left his soul. Once, drawn by the saint's renown, a peasant came to the monastery wishing to see him. When he was shown the saint, however, digging in the garden in a dirty undercassock, he did not believe it, and thought he was being mocked.

"I came to see a great prophet, and you show me a mere servant!" the peasant complained indignantly.

Sergius himself fed the dissatisfied man in his own cell, and said to him, "Do not be sad, friend! No one has ever left this place sad."

At that moment a prince came to the monastery, and fell to his knees before the saint. The peasant was horrified that he had spoken so to him. But Sergius comforted him and sent him back home.

Another time there was a shortage of food in the monastery. The saint went to one of the monks and offered to build a porch for his cell. When the construction was completed the owner paid him with a basket of moldy bread. But Sergius accepted even this "payment" gratefully, eating for the first time at sundown, even though the bread was so badly spoiled that the mold came out of his mouth like a cloud of smoke.

When the holy hierarch Alexis wanted to appoint the saint the successor to his see, Sergius refused outright. He said he would flee if any attempt was made to place him upon the episcopal throne.

This humility did not go unrewarded by God. The Lord bestowed numerous spiritual gifts upon the saint. Through the prayers of Saint Sergius God produced a spring of water for the brethren. An evil spirit went out of a possessed person the moment he was brought to the saint.

One man was carrying his dying son to Sergius, but along the way the child died. Overcome by grief, the father went to prepare a coffin, but the saint prayed and resurrected the youth.

“You need not be so sad; your son is alive!” the saint said to the father. But when the father began telling all of the miracle Sergius forbade him to make it known.

In addition to gifts of humility and wonderworking the abbot of Trinity Monastery offered the love of Christ to those around him. He founded new monasteries, reconciled princes, and denounced abusers. By his efforts holiness became the greatest ideal of the newborn Russia. Through the saint’s prayers Russian forces won a great victory on Kulikovo Field. Sergius supplied Saint Demetrius Donskoy with two monks and blessed them for battle against the invaders. During the battle itself on September 8, 1380, the saint and the brethren commemorated the warriors who were being killed at that very moment many kilometers away from the monastery.

The Lord vouchsafed the venerable one great revelations. When he was singing an akathist to the Theotokos together with his disciple Micah, the Mother of God herself appeared before him in heavenly glory together with the apostles Peter and John.

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“I will never leave this place,” the Most-pure One promised him.

Another time during nighttime prayer, amid rays of divine light Sergius saw a multitude of birds ascending to the heavens.

“So also will the number of your disciples be multiplied like these birds, and after you they will not diminish if they follow after you,” said a voice from heaven.

The saint loved to serve the Liturgy, and many saw angels concelebrating with him. Once not long before his death the whole altar was enveloped in celestial fire that came from the Holy Chalice, from which Sergius then communed.

The saint reposed in great old age on October 25, 1392, having communed of the Holy Mysteries, and entrusted his disciples to God and His Most-pure Mother.

The disciples and friends of the saint transfigured the whole of Russia. They founded numerous monasteries, and the news of the Risen Lord reached all pagan nations.

A friend of the saint, the holy hierarch Stephen of Perm, converted the Zyryans (or Komi) to Christianity. All the monasteries founded by Sergius and his disciples became spiritual pillars upholding the Russian people as they aspired to the Lord. It was through their efforts that the Orthodox Church arose from the ashes in which she had been left in the 13th century. Once again the Holy Spirit showed His strength to be made perfect in weakness.

Saint Sergius is commemorated on **October 8** and **July 8**.



## THE RISE OF PROTESTANTISM

As the Roman Church continued to change Divine Revelation, the West became increasingly dissatisfied both with papal lust for power and with the obvious violations of the Lord's commandments. In addition, many people, not finding the action of the Holy Spirit in their heretical community, sought Revelation of the mysteries outside of Christianity. Numerous people became involved in magic and gnostic heresies, with which the Church had done away at the very beginning of its history. As a result of these factors the Roman Church was split by the Protestant Reformation, which was begun by Martin Luther in 1517.

The Protestants initially spoke out against the heresies of Rome, such as the sale of indulgences, papal supremacy, and secular power. Instead of returning to the Orthodox Church, however, they decided to "restore the Church of the apostles." This proud idea led them to reject the better part of Church Tradition, proclaiming *Sola scriptura* ("Only Scripture") as their watchword. They began to teach that faith in Christ alone is sufficient for salvation, and no good works are necessary.

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They lost apostolic succession and consequently rejected practically all of the sacraments, losing the very essence of the Gospel. Having lost every possible criterion for understanding the Bible, the Protestants promptly split into numerous sects.

The newly-formed sects promptly began warring amongst themselves and with the Roman Catholics. Of the original Protestants the largest surviving movements are the Lutherans, the Calvinists (who believe that God predestined some for destruction and others for salvation), and the Anglicans. From these original movements then split off the Baptists, the Methodists, and other sects. Third-generation sects include the Seventh-day Adventists (based on the false prophecies of William Miller and Ellen G. White), the Pentecostals, and the "Jehovah's Witnesses."

The further the Protestants progressed, the further they departed from the apostolic faith, to the point that many of these movements cannot be considered even nominally Christian. The original Protestants themselves are departing ever further from God. They have already effectually rejected the Bible by adopting so-called "Bible criticism," which tears Scripture to shreds; they have accepted the theory of evolution, which denies God the Creator; and they have acknowledged the terrible sins of Sodom. Their fall continues to this day. Yet the sectarians stubbornly attempt to force their teaching upon the Orthodox, ruining souls not yet confirmed in Revelation.

## THE CHURCH UNDER ISLAMIC RULE

On May 29, 1453, the hordes of the Muslim Turks seized Constantinople and destroyed the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium). Thus God punished those who had attempted to save their country at the price of their faith. In 1441 Byzantium had adopted the Union of Florence with Rome, renouncing Orthodoxy. Only Mark of Ephesus remained steadfastly faithful to the Tradition of the apostles. Immediately after the fall of Constantinople the Church renounced the heresy, but its circumstances had already become extremely difficult. The majority of the Orthodox were now under the rule of the Turks, who viewed Christians as cattle (*rayah*) with hardly any rights. All the schools were destroyed, patriarchs changed at the sultan's whim, and everyone of any talent at all was destroyed or emigrated to the West. Christians had to pay huge sums and give their children to be janissaries, where they were forcibly converted to Islam.

But even then the Church continued its mission of salvation. Multitudes of martyrs shone forth in the Turkish Empire during the centuries of persecutions. Taking advantage of Orthodoxy's weakness, the western heretics (both Roman Catholics and Protestants) attempted through deception and bribery to seduce the Christians. But the Church withstood this at the Councils of the 15th–17th centuries. The inventions of both Catholicism (in 1484) and Protestantism (at the Councils of 1640, 1642, and 1672) were condemned.

In the 18th century a great rebirth of Orthodoxy began. Saint Kosmas of Aetolia walked through the cities and towns of Greece and Albania, converting many to Christ. He worked many wonders and prophesied. His feats incurred the hatred of both Jews and Muslims, and Saint Kosmas was vouchsafed a martyr's crown. At the same time on Holy Mount Athos a rebirth of monasticism began. Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and his friends restored the practice of frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries and compiled a collection of patristic works known as the *Philokalia*, which Orthodox use to this day to learn to ascend to the heavens. Through these efforts the Orthodox at last began to rise from their knees, and in the 19th century with Russia's help a number of countries cast off the Turkish yoke.

## THE OLD BELIEVER SCHISM

At a time when the Eastern Church was groaning beneath the oppression of Islam, Russia, now free from the Tatar Mongols, was the only remaining independent Orthodox state. As a result of Constantinople's temporary fall

into heresy the Russian Church became independent (in 1448). Many Russians began to believe that undistorted Orthodoxy was preserved by them alone, and they developed a haughty attitude toward their suffering brethren in the Orthodox East. This arrogance led to the occurrence of the Old Believer schism.

It was occasioned by an argument regarding the correction of liturgical books. Before printing was invented books were copied by hand, with the result that numerous errors crept into them. When the liturgical texts began to be printed it became necessary to unify all the texts, but selecting the correct version proved a complex matter.

Patriarch Nikon (1652–1666) decided to undertake a new translation of the divine services from the Greek text, one that would reflect the current practice of the Eastern Churches. This translation was approved by the Councils, but some were dissatisfied with it. Even before this there had been a circle of zealots at work in the patriarchal court that wished to reform the Church, in order to tear it away from Ecumenical Orthodoxy. These same zealots declared that the faith was dying because of the Greeks. They said it was impermissible to change the Russian liturgical customs (making the sign of the cross with two fingers, among other things), since this would supposedly destroy the faith.

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When the Church approved the change of these practices they organized a schism. The schismatics cried that the Antichrist had come to reign in the churches, and that the Holy Chalice contained Satan instead of the Lord's Body. They staged revolts and called upon the state to take action against the patriarch and all the supporters of ecclesiastical order. When the tsar did not take their side, not only Patriarch Nikon but even the tsar was declared to be the antichrist. As a result of this campaign the state began to persecute the schismatics, who called themselves Old Ritualists or Old Believers.

The Great Council of Moscow in 1666–1667 deposed Patriarch Nikon, but nevertheless approved his reforms. The schismatics were called upon to repent. A part of the Old Believers repented and was reunited to the Church, but the rest remained obstinate and were excommunicated.

In response to numerous rebellions organized by the Old Believers, as well as to prevent the preaching of ritual suicide (over twenty thousand persons perished by burning themselves alive), the state began to persecute the schismatics. The latter in turn became hardened and began to hate both Russia and the Orthodox Church.

Through falling away from grace the Old Believers lost the priesthood. Not one bishop entered into schism along with them, and as a result they lost their ability to participate in the sacraments.

The schismatics took two different paths to address this problem. Some Old Believers (the *bespopovtsy*, or “priestless” Old Believers) declared that

the priesthood had disappeared from the earth. Their community became a variation of Protestantism. Others used money to lure priests who had been barred from serving or who had fled from punishment, and after re-chrismating them they received the rites from them. This faction came to be called the *beglopovtsy* (“runaway priests”). In the 19th century a part of the *beglopovtsy* lured a Greek metropolitan, from whom they “restored” their hierarchy, contrary to the first rule of the holy apostles. And in the 19th century other *beglopovtsy* lured two bishops who had broken away from Orthodoxy. Thus arose the two primary false hierarchies of the Old Believers. In actuality the Old Believers have split into over 800 sects.

The Russian Church attempted on numerous occasions to return the schismatics, but they refused to compromise in any way. Though Christians can use the old books today, to this day the Old Believers remain obstinate in their delusions.

## VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF SAROV

One of the best-loved saints of the Orthodox Church is Venerable Seraphim of Sarov (1759–1833). In the early 18th century the Russian Church fell under the absolute control of the state. The office of patriarch was abolished, and councils were not held. In their place the Church was governed by the Holy Synod, which was under the complete control of the emperor.

This occurred because beginning with Peter I Russia was completely reorganized after the Western model. These external problems, however, were not as terrible as the fact that the educated contingent of Russian society became permeated with Western heretical and even atheistic ideas. The Holy Spirit did not desert the Church, and saints continued to shine forth even in that darkness. These included the hierarchs Demetrius of Rostov, Metrophanes of Voronezh, and Tikhon of Zadonsk. Frequently, however, many Christians forgot the very essence of Orthodoxy—the acquisition of the sanctity of God. Then, through the works of Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky, the Lord rejuvenated the ancient grace-filled ministry of eldership in Russian monasticism.

In Orthodoxy an elder is an ascetic (usually a monk) who has received the gift of consolation and instruction from the Holy Spirit. An elder, like the prophets of old, proclaims God’s will to men and helps them to find the shortest path to Divine radiance. The monasteries that form around elders are a light for all Christians, for they help them to see the attainability of the Kingdom of Christ. It is monasteries such as these that the disciples

of Saint Paisius founded, and it was in one of these that Saint Seraphim shone forth.

From childhood the grace of God set him apart. The Mother of God healed him of a fatal illness, and an angel of God saved him when he fell from a bell tower during its construction. In his youth he went to Sarov Monastery, where he was tonsured a monk. After being ordained a deacon Seraphim saw Christ at the Liturgy, coming with the holy angels. Soon after this he withdrew into the forest, and for a thousand days he prayed with tears upon a rock, asking God to grant him spiritual grace. For a long time he lived in seclusion. Once he was attacked by robbers, and in accordance with the Lord's command Saint Seraphim preferred to endure it rather than defend himself. The evildoers maimed him so severely that for the rest of his life he walked hunched over. Yet when they were arrested Seraphim insisted that they be pardoned.

On multiple occasions the Theotokos appeared to him and commanded him to receive all comers. Thus Saint Seraphim became a consoler of many, and many did he rescue from the depths of sin. All those who came to him he would meet with the words, "My joy, Christ is risen!"

Once, while talking with his disciple Nikolai Motovilov regarding the goal of Christian life, he said that this lies in the acquisition of the grace of the Holy Spirit. The latter asked what this meant, and immediately saw the holy elder shining more brightly than the noonday sun. Motovilov was enveloped in an unearthly warmth and an unusual fragrance. Thus the glory of God was manifested upon Saint Seraphim, to show the accessibility of grace for every Christian.

The saint went to the Lord on January 2 (old style), while he was kneeling in prayer. To this day the faithful receive countless multitudes of healings through the prayers of Saint Seraphim from his holy relics, which now rest in Diveyevo Convent, and from the holy springs dug by his own hands and sanctified by his prayers.

Saint Seraphim is commemorated on **January 15** and **August 1**.

## MISSIONARIES IN THE NEW ERA

**I**n the 18th–20th centuries the apostolic ministry saw a rebirth in the Orthodox Church. In the newly-annexed expanses of Siberia the Khants, the Mansi, the Yakuts, the Chukchi, and many other lesser nations began to convert to Christianity. Particularly renowned for his labors of preaching was the holy hierarch Innocent of Irkutsk, who converted numerous unbelievers

to Christ. His path was followed by Saint Macarius of Altai, who established a mission there. He was a nanny to the savages, whom he wrested from the clutches of both spiritual ignorance and physical poverty.

But the preaching of Christ was not confined to the borders of Russia. The Russian church sent its missionaries to America. These included Herman of Alaska, the hieromartyr Juvenalius, killed by the Indians for his preaching of the Lord, and the holy hierarch Innocent of Moscow, apostle to America. The latter traveled to savage islands, the expanses of the tundra and the taiga, and everywhere by his love he converted multitudes of the pagans. Through his labors the Orthodox Church of America came into being, which received ecclesiastical autocephaly, or self-government, in 1971.

Orthodox Christianity also penetrated to the great civilizations of the Far East—China and Japan. The Chinese mission was established in the late 18th century, but only in the late 19th century did preaching begin in earnest. Even this short time, however, bore considerable fruit. During the pagan insurrection of 1900 there were 222 newly-converted Chinese who received the crown of martyrdom. The Church of China became autonomous in 1956, but soon persecution by the cultural revolution wiped it off the face of the earth, leaving only a few thousand Christians who had no pastor. Only in recent times has Orthodoxy in China begun to rise once again.

The Church of Japan owes its existence to the apostolic labors of the holy hierarch Nicholas of Japan. He arrived in the country immediately after its borders were opened. For a long time he studied the language and traditions of the people. Through his expertise the divine services and Holy Scripture were translated into Japanese. The first Japanese to convert was the pagan priest Sawabe, who wanted to kill the saint. Saint Nicholas asked Sawabe, “Why do you hate what you do not know?” The priest began to study Scripture and received baptism with the name Paul, and later became one of the first Japanese priests. By the time of the saint’s blessed end (in 1912) the Church of Japan numbered about thirty thousand new converts.

In our time Orthodoxy has spread over all the earth. It is rapidly developing in Central Africa, where multitudes of people accept Christianity, drawn by the miracles and love of Greek missionaries. In the USA Orthodoxy is embraced by Protestants who recognize in it the inviolate apostolic Church for which they have longed.

Thus the Lord’s command to preach the Gospel to all nations is fulfilled to this day by His Church. But an even greater harvest still awaits. The countries of the Islamic world—India, Indochina, China, Tibet—have not been enveloped by the light of the Good News, and there are few Orthodox in Central and South America. And so the path lies wide open to those who would receive the reward of the apostles.



## THE GREAT PERSECUTIONS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

As has been said above, in the 11th century the West began to fall away from God. First arose the heresy against the Holy Spirit and the Church. Then particular significance was attributed to fallen man. Deprived of the grace of God, man decided that his current state was the natural one. This trend had already surfaced in medieval scholasticism, and it reached its apotheosis during the Renaissance. Man was declared the measure of all things, and it was decided that he himself was capable of creating a paradise on earth by his own efforts. This teaching came to be called *humanism*.

Having established a new science based on Christian premises (that the universe is one and may be known, and the consequence of the dogma of creation), the humanists decided to make it the measure of absolute truth. On this basis and on the basis of various other conjectures they first founded *deism*. According to this doctrine the world was created by God, who set it in motion as one winds a watch, then withdrew. There are no divine miracles, and there is no communion with God. Everything progresses according to internal laws, moving toward perfection.

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Based on this perception there arose the myths of *progress* and *evolution*. The humanists then went on to proclaim that science had supposedly proven that God did not exist and had never existed. Man was the sum of social relations. Some began to say that what mattered most was a person's material wellbeing, which determines everything else. This gave rise to communism (and socialism). Others said that what mattered most was the nation or the state. This gave rise to fascism and nationalist socialism. Still others avowed that what mattered most was a person's inalienable rights, limited by nothing but the rights of others. This gave rise to liberalism.

The majority of humanists became *atheists* (godless people), who hated all those who believed in God. Others became *pantheists* (who believe that everything is god). All of them, however, returned to paganism, and began worshiping creation instead of the Creator. They deified the state, the ruler, science and its accomplishments, sports, and culture. Many reverted to outright worship of Satan.

Thus, by the dawn of the 20th century they had amassed sufficient strength to unleash a terrible persecution upon the Orthodox Church, eclipsing in force all the persecutions of the Roman emperors and Islamic rulers of old. Once again the armies of the devil emerged from the gates of hell, bent on destroying the Kingdom of Christ.

This attack was no coincidence for the Lord. For several decades prior to this the elders of Optina Hermitage, Saint Seraphim, and the holy hierarchs

Ignatius (Brianchaninov) and Theophan the Recluse had been exhorting Christians to renounce the falsehood of the humanists.

In the early 20th century God raised up a great prophet: the holy righteous John of Kronstadt, who possessed tremendous wonderworking power, such that he even raised the dead. The saint denounced the apostates who had rejected the Orthodox faith in the name of science and humanism, and foretold the coming of great misfortunes through the revolution.

But the humanists, proud of their sham knowledge, merely mocked the Christians, laying the path for the coming bloodbath. Their idols were Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, and other antitheists. Many supposedly Orthodox people were seduced by the humanist lie and actively facilitated the destruction of Christian civilization. This incurred the Lord's righteous wrath, and He gave the apostates over into the hands of their own spawn.

So it was that during the Great World War of 1914–1918 the design of the humanists was brought to fruition. First the Turks under their direction began a terrible butchery of the Christians in Asia Minor, due to which of Turkey's several million Christians only about five thousand now remain. The heavens were adorned with multitudes of Greek martyrs.

The year 1917 saw the most terrible catastrophe of all. On March 2, 1917, the holy Russian emperor Nicholas II was deposed and murdered along with all his family, and the humanists came to power.

Thus ended the epoch of the holy equal-to-the-apostles Constantine, which had lasted for a millennium and a half. In October of 1917 the communists seized power and launched a terrible persecution of the Church, which continued to a greater or lesser degree right up until the collapse of communist rule in 1991.

But God did not leave His Church without support. During this most difficult time a patriarch once again appeared to head the Russian Church, elected at the Local Council of 1917–1918. Saint Tikhon of Moscow laid the foundation for the Church's survival amid the new persecutions. The first martyr for Christ was the hieromartyr Vladimir, metropolitan of Kiev. He was followed by millions of Christians who remained faithful to the Lord even unto death.

It is difficult even to list the sufferings which the saints endured. The communists nailed priests to crosses, drowned them in the sea, drove them into terrible concentration camps, gunned them down by the hundreds (in the Moscow suburb of Butovo several tens of thousands of the saints are buried), and buried them alive in the ground. Churches were blown up, relics were desecrated, icons were burned. But all these persecutions merely served to cleanse the Church of those who were Christians in name only. Then the persecutors began to incite schisms in the Church itself. Thus appeared the Renovationists, who altered the divine services and the canons

of Orthodoxy. Zealots splintered the Church, demanding that it go underground. But these temptations also were overcome by the feats of the new martyrs.

Only at the onset of World War II did the persecution of Christians abate. For in 1939 there were only four bishops left unimprisoned, awaiting their deaths.

Persecutions likewise descended upon the Church from the Nazis, who had seized half of Europe. After Germany's defeat in World War II (1939–1945) the terrible persecutions extended to the churches of the Balkan Peninsula. In Romania, for example, priests were forced to work in the salt mines, spending the feast of Pascha pounding spikes with sledgehammers, which for them took the place of the pealing of church bells.

The Churches of Albania and China suffered particularly, being nearly completely destroyed. By the time the communist dictatorship in Albania was overthrown only 24 priests were left alive. All the bishops were executed by firing squad.

After the fall of communism the Church continued to be persecuted by the Muslim and Catholic rulers of Bosnia and Croatia. Nevertheless, by the 1990s persecutions on a global scale had practically ceased altogether. The churches began to rise from the ruins, adorned by multitudes of new saints who had ascended to the heavens. And this new attack of the devil, carried out by the hands of the humanists, was drowned once again in the blood of the saints.

The Synaxis of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia is celebrated on **January 25/February 12**.

## HIEROMARTYR HILARION OF VEREYA

One of the most striking saints to shine forth during the persecutions in Russia was the hieromartyr Hilarion (Troitsky), archbishop of Vereya. An outstanding theologian and the chief proponent of the restoration of the office of patriarch, during the terrible persecutions he became the chief helper of the holy Patriarch Tikhon. Consecrated to the episcopacy in 1920, Hilarion headed the fight against the Renovationist schism orchestrated by the communists. The Renovationists claimed that the Church needed to be brought into sync with the times and made to “serve the people.” To this end they introduced the Gregorian calendar, attempted to translate the divine services into the vernacular, and consecrated married priests to the episcopacy. Through their slander the patriarch was arrested. Arrested along with

him was the Renovationists' chief opponent, Saint Hilarion, for the schismatics could not overcome the great theologian in debate.

The hierarch was exiled to the Solovki concentration camp, based at a former monastery. While in captivity Hilarion did not lose his joyous state of soul, for the Spirit of God strengthened him. He became a fisherman, and loved to say, "The Holy Spirit provides all things. Whereas once He made fisherman to be theologians, now He has made theologians to be fishermen."

He was capable of never even noticing that he had been robbed, and on several occasions even had heart-to-heart talks with the thieves, many of whom consequently turned to the Lord. On one occasion, at a time when the sea was filled with slush ice that was practically impossible to escape, the saint courageously pulled one of the cruelest overseers from the water, showing an example of Christ-like love.

One of the chief persecutors of the Church, Tuchkov, offered Hilarion his freedom if the hierarch would recognize the Renovationists, but he refused, though he knew that for this death awaited him. He spoke out against the new schisms that had arisen in the Church, and for this the Soviet authorities decided to destroy the hierarch. He was exiled to the wilderness of Central Asia, but along the way he fell fatally ill with typhoid, and on December 15/28 he reposed in a Leningrad prison with the words, "Now I am completely free; no one can lay hands on me! How good it feels! Now we are far from ..."

And with these words his soul ascended to Christ.

Hieromartyr Hilarion is commemorated twice, on **December 28** and **May 10**.

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## VENERABLE SERAPHIM OF VYRITSA

Vasily Nikolaevich Muravyev (the future Seraphim of Vyritsa) was born on March 31, 1866, in the village of Vakhromeevo, Arefinskaya Volost, Rybinsky County, in the Yaroslav Governorate. He was named in baptism after Saint Basil the New, a confessor.

It pleased the Lord that before renouncing the world and its cares this young ascetic might be perfected in service in the arenas of commerce and family life. In 1892 Vasily Nikolaevich opened his own enterprise, a fur processing and sales business.

In 1890 with the blessing of his father, Varnava, Vasily married Olga Ivanovna. After Liturgy on the twelve great feasts and on feasts in honor of miraculous icons of the Mother of God and particularly venerated saints, the Muravyev family had a custom of setting out tables laden with every kind of food and inviting all the needy in from the streets for a meal.

In 1917 Russia was beset by difficult trials. Many of the Muravyev family's well-to-do acquaintances hurried to transfer their assets abroad and began leaving the country, hoping to wait out the times of trouble abroad. For Vasily Muravyev there was never any such question. For three years after the October Revolution the Muravyev family lived for the most part in the suburbs. The insurrection and the shift of power cost the Muravyevs their business, and during this period, free from worldly cares, Vasily Nikolaevich immersed himself in reading the works of the holy fathers, studying monastic orders and liturgical books, and solitary prayer.

This faithful disciple of Saint Barnabas of Gethsemane at first intended to enter the Trinity Sergius Lavra, there to labor at the relics of his spirit-bearing mentor in Gethsemane Skete. But the Lord willed otherwise. Unexpectedly, Vasily Nikolaevich received the blessing of Metropolitan Benjamin of Petrograd and Gdov to receive the monastic tonsure at the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. On October 29, 1920, the abbot of the Lavra, Archimandrite Nikolai (Yarushevich), tonsured Vasily Muravyev a monk with the name Varnava in honor of his spiritual father, Elder Barnabas of Gethsemane.

In 1926 Archimandrite Sergiy (Biryukov) began preparing Father Varnava to take on the obedience of spiritual father. Before beginning his ministry of eldership Father Varnava expressed the desire to be clothed in the great schema. At his tonsure to the great schema he was given the name Seraphim in honor of Saint Seraphim, Wonderworker of Sarov.

Hieroschemamonk Seraphim (Muravyev) spent nearly three years laboring in the arena of his duties as spiritual father of the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. During the many hours of daily confessions the priest was obliged to stand for long periods on the cold stone floor of the Trinity Cathedral. Father Seraphim's health deteriorated rapidly. His physicians strongly advised that he leave the city for a greener area. Vyritsa was suggested by way of a climatic health resort, and by the summer of 1930 Father Seraphim had left the city of the holy apostle Peter. After moving to Vyritsa he no longer sought medical help, saying, "God's will be done in all things. Illness is a school of humility, where a person truly learns his infirmity."

The labors of fasting, vigil, and prayer that the elder of Vyritsa humbly bore for two decades may only be compared to the labors of the ascetic hermits of old. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday the elder ate nothing whatsoever, and sometimes ate nothing for several days at a time. What he did eat on the days when he took food was scarcely worthy of the name. Of Father Seraphim it may be said that "his nourishment was the Holy Spirit." Without question it was the grace of God that fortified the great faster. The priests of Kazan Church in Vyritsa communed Father Seraphim each week of the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

Imitating his heavenly teacher, the elder of Vyritsa undertook a new labor, praying in a garden upon a rock before an icon of the wonderworker

of Sarov. This the elder did on those days when his health was somewhat improved. The first accounts of Saint Seraphim of Vyritsa's prayers upon the rock date back to 1935, when the persecutors rained down new and terrible blows upon the Church. With the onset of World War II the elder intensified his prayer upon the rock, and began to pray there daily. And the prayer of the unforgettable elder reached the Throne of God. It is a fact that in Vyritsa itself, as the elder had foretold, not a single dwelling perished, and not one person was killed.

In his final years Father Seraphim was completely bedridden. The hour of the elder's transition into eternity was revealed to him. Early in the morning the Most-holy Theotokos appeared to Venerable Seraphim amid blinding radiance and gestured with her right hand toward the sky. The ascetic told his relations of this, and stated, "Today I cannot receive anyone; I will be praying." The holy venerable Seraphim of Vyritsa departed for eternity on April 3, 1949, on the feast of the resurrection of the righteous Lazarus.

## A TESTAMENT OF THE CHURCH OF THE NEW MARTYRS

Among the priceless treasures left us by the saints of the 20th century, their writings sent from prisons and camps hold a special place, wafting the fragrance of the Holy Spirit. If we were to give a brief summary of the most important things that they gleaned from that terrible hell on earth wrought by the antitheists, they would be best expressed in the letter of Saint Seraphim of Vyritsa, sent to one of his spiritual daughters who was languishing in a communist prison. In it we see a gleam of the most profound mystery of prayer, in the form of a conversation between God and a person's soul. It is the spiritual testament of an elder, and it is addressed to all of us.

We include it here, as its significance is not temporal, but eternal. For it comes from beyond the bounds of the universe, from the Loving God, from Whose hands the Church drank the bitter cup of cleansing sufferings.

### This Was From Me

An exhortation from Saint Seraphim of Vyritsa

Have you ever thought that all that concerns you concerns Me also? For what concerns you concerns the apple of My eye. You are precious in My sight and of great price, and I have loved you, and so for Me it is a particular joy to rear you. When temptations and the enemy come upon you like a river, I want you to know that this was from Me—that your weakness has need of my strength, and that your safety lies in giving Me the opportunity to protect you.



Are you amid difficult circumstances, among people who do not understand you, who are indifferent to what pleases you, who reject you? This was from Me. I am your God, Who arranges your circumstances, and it is not by chance that you are where you are. It is the very place that I have appointed for you. Did you not ask me to teach you humility? See, I have placed you in the very surroundings, the very school, where this lesson is learned. Your surroundings and the people who live with you are merely performing My will.

Are you in financial difficulty? Is it hard for you to make ends meet? Know that this was from Me. For I have charge over your means, and I desire that you might run to Me and know that you are dependent on Me. My stores are inexhaustible. I desire that you might be assured of My faithfulness and My promises. Let it not be that any should be able to say to you in your time of need, "Do not believe the Lord your God!"

Have you spent a night in sorrow? Are you parted from those near and dear to your heart? This was from Me sent to you from Me. I am the Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; I allowed this so that you might turn to Me, that in Me you might find eternal consolation.

Have you been deceived in your friend, or in anyone to whom you have opened your heart? This was from Me. I allowed this disappointment to touch you that you might learn that your best friend is the Lord. I desire that you might bring all things to Me and tell them to Me.

Has anyone slandered you? Leave this to Me, and cleave closer to Me, your Refuge, in your soul, hiding from the slander of tongues, and I will exalt your righteousness like light, and your justice like noonday.

Have your plans come to nothing, and are you dejected in soul and weary? Know that this was from Me. You made your plans, you had your own designs, and you brought them to Me for My blessing. But I wish you to leave the arrangement and management of your life to Me, since you are only the tool, not the craftsman.

If unexpected failures in life have overtaken you, and despondency has seized your heart, know that this was from Me. For I desire that your heart and your soul might always be aflame before My eyes and overcome all faintness of heart by My name.

If you have gone long without hearing from those near and dear to you, and in your faintness of heart you fall into murmuring and despair, know that this was from Me. For by this languishing of your spirit I test your faith in the immutability of My promises and the boldness of your prayer for those close to you, for was it not you who entrusted their care to My providential love? Is it not you who even now entrusts them to the Protection of My Most-pure Mother?

Has a grave illness befallen you, whether temporary or incurable, and you have found yourself bedridden? This was from Me. For I desire that you

might come to know Me still more deeply in your bodily infirmities, and not murmur against this trial sent down upon you, and that you might not attempt to penetrate My plans for the salvation of men's souls by various means, but might uncomplainingly and submissively bow your head before My goodness toward you.

Have you dreamed of doing some great work for Me, and instead been confined to a bed of sickness and infirmity? This was from Me. For then you would have been engrossed in your own affairs, and I could not have drawn your thoughts toward Me. For I desire to teach you My most profound thoughts and lessons, that you might be in service to Me. I wish to teach you to recognize that you are nothing without Me. Some of My best sons are those who are cut off from active participation, that they might learn to wield the weapon of unceasing prayer.

Have you been called unexpectedly to a difficult and demanding post, relying on Me? I entrust you with these difficulties, and for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your affairs, in all your ways, and in all things your Lord will be your Guide and Teacher. This day I have given this vessel of blessed oil into your hands, My child; use it freely. Remember always that every difficulty that arises, every insulting word directed at you, every false accusation and condemnation, every hindrance in your work that evokes feelings of frustration or disappointment, every discovery of your own infirmity and impotence will be anointed with this oil. This was from Me.

Remember that every hindrance is an admonition from God, and for this reason receive into your heart the words that I have declared to you this day, for this was from Me. Keep them, and know and remember always, wherever you may be, that every sting will be dulled when you learn to see Me in all things. All things are sent by Me for the perfection of your soul, and all this was from Me.

Saint Seraphim of Vyritsa is commemorated on **April 3**.

## THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY

**T**he Orthodox Church enters the third millennium of its existence with a quarter of a billion members, about six hundred bishops, and several tens of thousands of priests. Today the Ecumenical Church consists of fifteen autocephalous (self-governing) local churches.

The ancient canons ascribed a primacy of honor to the Roman Church, setting the Church of Constantinople second after it. Unfortunately, the great schism of 1054 remains unhealed, and the Roman Church persists in heresy to this day, and so the first among the churches is the Patriarchate of Constanti-

nople. It comprises five thousand Christians in Turkey, the monastic republic of Athos, and several million Orthodox in Europe, America, and Australia.

The second church in Orthodoxy is the Church of Alexandria, founded by the evangelist Mark. It is the fastest-growing Church, comprising millions of Orthodox from Central and South Asia and from Egypt.

The third church is the Church of Antioch, in which Christians were first given that name. It includes the Christians of Syria, Eastern Turkey, Lybia, and Iraq, as well as Arabic emigrants in the countries of the West.

The fourth is the Mother of the Churches—the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. It includes the Orthodox of Israel, Palestine, and Jordania. It is the ancient custom for the patriarch of Jerusalem to receive the Holy Fire that descends from heaven on the eve of Pascha at the Lord's tomb. This patriarchate includes the ancient autonomous Church of Syria, which unites the Christians of the Sinai Peninsula. Its center is the Monastery of Saint Catherine.

The fifth church in the list is the Russian Church (the Moscow Patriarchate). It includes the Christians of Russia, Ukraine (the Ukrainian Church is a self-governing part of the Moscow Patriarchate), Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. It also includes the autonomous Churches of Japan and China.<sup>108</sup> It is the most numerous church in the world.

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Unfortunately, in recent times a number of schisms have fallen away from the Russian Church in Ukraine, exchanging their heavenly fatherland for nationalism. This includes the “Kievan Patriarchate” and the “Ukrainian Autocephalous Church.” All these assemblies are devoid of grace, and salvation in them is impossible.

The Georgian Church, founded in the fourth century by the holy equal-to-the-apostles Nina, ministers to the Christians of that Caucasian country.

The pastoral authority of the Serbian Church extends to the Christians of former Yugoslavia. This church is currently enduring cruel persecutions from Islamists. From the Serbian Church the Church of Macedonia departed into schism.

The Romanian Church rules the only one of the Romance peoples that is entirely Orthodox: the Romanians. This church is one of the richest in parishes (their small country contains over twenty-five thousand).

The Bulgarian Church includes the Christians of Bulgaria.

The Church of Cyprus, founded by the apostles Paul and Barnabas, received its independence at the 3rd Ecumenical Council. It includes the Christians of Cyprus.

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<sup>108</sup> Editor's note: As of 2007 the Russian Church also includes the autonomous Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR), formed in the early 1920s in response to Bolshevik persecution of Christians and interference in the administration of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church of Greece ministers to the Orthodox of Greece. This church is one of the world's most active, and helps conducts missionary work throughout the world. In the last century it has produced many great righteous men and elders who now adorn the heavens. The most recent of these was Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain, who died in 1994.

The Church of Albania rose from the ashes of persecution in 1992. Today it is headed by one of the greatest missionaries of our time, Archbishop Anastasios, who strives to convert the Albanians to Christ.

The Church of Poland ministers to the Orthodox of Poland, Portugal, and Brazil.

The Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia was founded by the hieromartyr Gorazd. He converted tens of thousands from Roman Catholicism and was killed by the fascists in 1942. Today this church includes the Orthodox of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The Church of America sees to the needs of part of the Orthodox of the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

All these churches are united by a union of faith, hope, and love. Together the Orthodox hierarchs work to overcome divisions and temptations, in order to fulfill Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all nations (Mt. 28:18–20) and to lead the flock to salvation. But this task is not yet completed, for a third of humanity has not yet heard the apostolic preaching.

In addition to the episcopate, considerable local authority is exercised by monastic ascetics who are striving for perfection. To this day the spiritual capital of Orthodoxy is Holy Mount Athos, which disperses harbingers of sanctity to all the world. In Russia the undisputed spiritual centers to this day remain the Trinity Sergius Lavra and the Pskov Caves Lavra, in which over the last few years many wise ascetics have blossomed.

To this day martyrs are born in the Orthodox Church. This includes the hundreds of Christians martyred by the Muslims in Serbia and Chechnya, and the monks of the Optina Hermitage killed by a satanist on Pascha in 1993, and many other saints who remained faithful to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit continues to renew His Church and to lead its children to sanctity.

## SIGNS OF THE APPROACHING END OF THE WORLD

We know that this world will not last forever. Orthodox Christians await the return of their beloved Lord Jesus Christ, that He might take us to Himself, into the kingdom of the love of His Father. But this will only take place

when the Gospel has reached all nations inhabiting the earth, and has gathered all who are capable of receiving it and of being reborn by the grace of the Spirit (Mt. 24:14). Then there will no longer be any reason for the world to exist in its current form, and then will come the end. Both good and evil have already been sown. They are developing and growing, and both will mature in their proper time. This cannot occur before the time appointed.

The world stands in order that the salvific power with which the Lord has infused our generation might do its work, as leaven works in dough. The Word of God walks the earth, rousing those that sleep and leading them to the sources of grace. This phenomenon is found everywhere—among unbelievers, those gone astray, and those who rightly believe. This world still exists because not all those who are suited for the Kingdom of Christ have entered into it, or not as many as there should be.

The salvific power infused by the Lord into our generation holds back by its action the coming of the Antichrist. When it ceases to act, then he will take the stage. Thus, the Antichrist's coming is prevented by that which not all have yet heard, and not all of those foreknown have yet accepted—the Gospel—and by the fact that the grace of the Holy Spirit still abides and still has work to do in the human race (Saint Theophan the Recluse, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*).

Simultaneously with the increase of good, however, during which all those foreknown by the Father enter the heavenly dwellings to await Christ's return, evil is also on the rise, and its impure seeds are sprouting. The tares are also growing, as Christ foretold. In the words of the apostle Paul, *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work* (2 Thess. 2:7). It is manifested in the



existence of secret anti-Christian societies, and in revolutions, and in the flourishing of man-worship, and in magic. But for now the grace of God and the power of the state are restraining that evil.

When the day of the worldwide harvest arrives, then that restraining force will leave the universe. All the states that arose out of the Roman Empire will collapse, and total anarchy will ensue. And from this global chaos will arise the greatest of the wicked, the last enemy of God: the Antichrist.

## THE ANTICHRIST

**T**his greatest of the wicked will be a man, and not an incarnation of the devil, as some think. Holy Scripture tells us enough concerning this lawless man's origins for us to recognize him.

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He will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. Possessed of great genius and false virtues, he will become proud and will enter into an alliance with Satan. The ancient serpent himself will dwell in him as in a vessel, imparting to him the power to work false miracles. The Hebrew nation will accept the Antichrist as the Messiah, and will facilitate his reign. He himself will also do everything to pass himself off as Christ the Savior. Before him, as before the Lord Jesus, a forerunner will come—a false prophet who will work such signs and wonders that he will even call down fire from heaven.

Imitating the God-man, the Antichrist will send false apostles to all the ends of the earth, so as to seduce the people by deceit and magic. He will promise peace and safety to all. As a result the Antichrist will become the ruler of the planet. His power will last three and a half years. His capital will be Jerusalem. He will restore the Temple in Jerusalem and will sit in it as God, passing himself off as God. He will come in his own name, as the greatest master of mankind, and will demand that he be worshiped as befits God.

Then the greatest of all persecutions of Christians will begin. All the churches will be defiled. But to the end the Orthodox Church will remain, the Liturgy will be served, and saints will appear.

The false prophet will set up an image of the Antichrist, and will make it to speak and to kill all those who refuse to worship the idol. All those who do worship it will receive a mark upon their hand or their forehead bearing the name of the Antichrist or its numerical equivalent (666). By this sign people will be deprived of God's protection and will become slaves of the enemy. Holy Scripture promises them eternal torment in the fire of Gehennah.



God will not let the apostates go unpunished. A series of plagues will descend upon the perishing earth, more than befell Egypt. The seas and rivers will turn to blood. Unheard-of sicknesses will appear. The world will be seized by famine and misfortune. Hail from heaven and monstrous earthquakes will leave the dry land barren. The apostates will hate both each other and the Christians.

In order to bridle the rush of evil God will send two final preachers of repentance: the prophets Enoch and Elijah, who were taken up alive into heaven. They will exhort men to reject the Antichrist and to glorify Christ. All of their enemies will meet with heavenly retribution. Under the influence of their preaching a tremendous victory of God will be accomplished: the Jewish people will repent of their iniquities and receive Jesus Christ, Whom their fathers rejected. When the time of their preaching ends the Antichrist himself will kill them in the streets of Jerusalem and will forbid them to be buried. All the apostates will exult in their deaths, but three days later God will resurrect them and will raise them up into the heavens. Infuriated, the Antichrist will gather his forces to destroy the last of the Christians. But when all hope fails for the Christians, then Christ will return to earth.

## THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST THE SAVIOR

**S**uddenly, when the shadow of Satan's wings falls upon mankind, the victorious trophy of Christ—the precious Cross—will shine forth in the heavens. And the Conqueror of death Himself will return to earth in the same way that the apostles saw Him ascending into heaven. Before Him a fire will be ignited, consuming all His enemies. Surrounded by countless forces of fiery angels and accompanied by the souls of all His saints, He will descend on radiant clouds upon the Mount of Olives. The Antichrist and the false prophet will perish at His very breath. The ancient enemy Satan will be bound and cast at the feet of Christ the Victor.

The sun will grow dark, and the moon will not give its light, overshadowed by the uncreated brilliance. The stars will fall from the heavens like fruits shaken from the trees by a hurricane. The flaming heavens themselves will roll up like a scroll with a great noise, revealing the Divine reality concealed beyond them. The whole world will be awash in the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit, Who will renew the universe. The elements of the world will heat up and become molten. The earth and all its affairs will be burned



up, and a new earth and a new heaven will appear, in which righteousness abides.

At the revealed power of God, when He comes to be glorified in His saints, all the hosts of heaven will tremble in terror. They will meet the coming Judge with the sounds of trumpets, proclaiming the approach of the unending Kingdom of God.

The singing will grow louder and louder, until finally at the sound of the final and most powerful trumpet of the archangel Michael one of the Creator's greatest miracles will occur.

## THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The beautiful sound of the trumpet resounding over the burial fields will proclaim the great time of resurrection. And the bodies lying in the graves will suddenly hear the voice of the Risen Christ. Bones will begin moving towards each other, flesh and nerves will grow upon them, and skin will cover them. All the particles of the body, which the soul has never forgotten, will unite with each other in the form that the soul has preserved.

It does not matter what happened to the human body—whether it was burned, incinerated by a nuclear blast, or devoured by wild beast or cannibal. God's mastery extends to all places, and He watches over our every atom, so as to restore to us what we had lost. As the word of God at the beginning of creation immediately became deed, so also in the resurrection Christ's command will immediately be carried out. According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa, the atoms will release their energy, and by it the soul will find its beloved body, brought together for it by the power of God.

Our bodies will be the same as they were at the moment of death, but now in complete compliance with the Creator's design. No longer will people be deformed, crippled, or ill. All nature will be restored as God intended it to be. Not one person will escape resurrection; righteous and sinners together will return to life. Only man's free will shall remain unchanged. As the person was on the day of his death, so he will appear before the throne of the Judge.

But though those resurrected will be the same as those who died, men's resurrected bodies will exist in a different form than now. As the apostle Paul writes, *It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body* (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

The risen bodies will be like the flesh of the Risen Lord—refined, other-worldly, no longer subject to death and the laws of matter, perfectly reflecting the state of the soul. Hence, as Christ says, the righteous will shine as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father (Mt. 13:43). For that invisible glory of the Holy Spirit which is hidden in them now will be made plain on the Last Day. The sinners will bear upon themselves the mark of their transgressions. Darkness will enshroud their bodies as it now enshrouds their souls. But since each is righteous or sinful to different degrees, their glory or shame will likewise differ.

These bodies will last for eternity. Death will vanish for all time. We are all destined for bodily immortality—some to a resurrection of glory, others to a resurrection of condemnation.

Those who live to see the Day of Judgment will not die at all, but will be instantaneously changed in the fire, to the sound of the trumpets awakening

the dead. Their corruptible and mortal bodies will be clothed in incorruption and immortality. Thus death shall be swallowed up by victory for all time! (1 Cor. 15:51–54).

## THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE UNIVERSE

**A**long with mankind this transfiguration will encompass the whole universe. The dead heavens and flaming earth will be restored by the power of the Holy Spirit. He will drive every trace of evil and death out of the world. Instead of the visible sun God Himself will be a light for creation. Time will end and eternity will ensue, into which all creatures will enter. For the righteous eternal day will dawn, while sinners will be enveloped in eternal night.

The heavens will become accessible for men. The earth will become the earth of the living. There will be no more illness, death, corruption, sorrow, or deserts. No more will the beasts devour one another. The lamb will lie down with the wolf, and the ox with the lion. No one will harm anyone else upon the great mountain of God.

The heart of the new earth will be the New Jerusalem, which proceeds from God. It is described as a mystical city, made of transparent gold and precious stones. In its center the Throne of God will shine. From his footstool the crystal river of the Holy Spirit will flow forth, around which the tree of life will continually bear fruit. This grace will visibly renew the whole world, which will continually glorify the Creator. The image of the corruptible world will pass away, but the world itself will remain, robed in Divine incorruption.

## THE LAST JUDGMENT

**T**he trembling angels will set up a great white Throne, upon which Christ will sit. From before His face heaven and earth will flee, and there will be no place for them. The angels will gather God's chosen from all the ends of the earth, and they will be born upon the clouds of heaven to meet the Redeemer, and will surround His sacred throne.

All other men, from the first to the last, will be led into the valley of Jehoshaphat, near Jerusalem. The groaning crowds in the valley of judgment will see the Lord Jesus Christ, His Body bearing the marks of the wounds, and all those who crucified Him (Caiaphas, Pilate, and Judas) will weep openly, seeing their Judge to be Jesus Whom they rejected.

At Christ's command the angels will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep will be set at the right hand of the Lord, and the goats at the left. The judges—the twelve apostles—will take their places, and the books of the conscience of each will be opened. Then the eternal King will say to those on the right: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me* (Mt. 25:34–36).

Then the righteous will ask the Savior, “Lord, when did we do this for You?”

*Verily I say unto you, the Lord will answer, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren (the poor), ye have done it unto Me* (Mt. 25:40).

Then all the secret good works of men will be revealed. Every charitable gift, every prayer, every manifestation of love and righteousness will shine before all. And Christ will boast in the righteous before the Heavenly Father.

Then the terrible face of God will turn to those standing on the left, and Christ will say to the sinners, *Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited Me not* (Mt. 25:41–43).

Then the sinners will ask Him, “When did we see You in need and did not serve You?”

*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me* (Mt. 25:45), Christ will reply.

Then all the unrepented crimes of the world will be revealed. All iniquities will be punished, and all offenses will be avenged. The perfect justice for which the prophets and the martyrs prayed will ensue.

Thus the incarnate God the Son will pass the Father's judgment upon the world. For to Him all power over the universe has been given, since He became a Man so that none might dare to say to God, “You have not lived our life, You have not kept Your own law, and so it is not for You to judge us!” The Crucified and Risen Jesus is the merciful and just King Who rewards each according to his deeds.

## THE ETERNAL TORMENT OF SINNERS

**T**he sinners will go away into eternal torment, and will receive punishment for their evil deeds. All the enemies of Christ the Victor will be cast at His feet, and then God's vengeance will be wrought. All who are not written in

God's Book of Life will be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone. This is a second death. There the wretches will be tormented eternally before Christ and His angels. Three kinds of torment await them: eternal fire, outer darkness, and the worm that does not die.

The eternal fire is the manifestation in hardened sinners of the mighty power of God, which burns those who have refused to make peace with Him. For Scripture says that our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). It is for this reason that God says through the prophet Isaiah, *Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand* (Is. 50:11).

The outer darkness is the darkness of not knowing God. God is the unwaning Light, but if a person voluntarily besmears his spiritual eyes with filth he cannot help but be swallowed up by darkness. The accursed will abide in eternal loneliness. Never again will they be able to harm anyone, for their powers of action (their hands and feet) will be fettered.

The worm of Gehennah will devour them. This is both an actual creature and a manifestation of the conscience, which devours a person's soul with the torment of impotent remorse. With good cause did the Lord say, *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Mt. 25:30).

These terrible torments will never end, and there will be no salvation for those who rejected the grace of God in this life.

## THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The happiness of the righteous is something no tongue can express. As the apostle Paul wrote, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit* (1 Cor. 2:9–10).

The righteous will receive an eternal heavenly treasury, incorrupt, unfading, a pure inheritance prepared by God the Father since before creation. Eternal gladness will come to them, and all sicknesses, sorrows, and sighing will flee. There will be neither hunger nor thirst, and God Himself will wipe away the tears from every face. Thus men will become like the angels and will become their eternal friends.

The greatest happiness will lie in beholding God directly, face to Face. Christ will fulfill His promise: He will return and take us to be with Him. Christians will see the glory of God and will become participants in the Divine life, and the entire Holy Trinity will come to abide in the hearts of the saved. The victors will receive all things: they will become children of



God, they will reign with Him, and they will be like Him. The name of God will shine upon their brow, and hence they will be called gods by grace, for through the gift of the Creator they will have everything that God has, except for communion in His essence.

No longer will anything accursed remain. There will be no more evil, nor impure thoughts, nor temptations, nor passions. Immortal bliss and dispassion will encompass the saints, and never again will it be supplanted by a fall, for their choice has already been made.

The mind of man will receive the greatest pleasure through perfect knowledge, given it by the Heavenly Father. His thoughts will be in union with the great thoughts of the Mind that created the universe.

Men's senses will be inundated with joy at the vision of God, sacred beauty will encompass the saints, and love will endlessly increase in their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The will shall achieve inner wholeness. It will be united without confusion with the will of God, and through this it will achieve unshakable firmness in good.

The bodies of the saved, delivered from the corruption of death, will shine like the sun, permeated by the effulgence of the Creator. Thus the design which the Creator conceived before the creation of the universe will be brought to fulfillment.

Scripture foretells that the righteous will be able to fly as the angels, making the whole world accessible to them. The righteous will commence to reign over the renewed universe, and their blessedness will increase and abide eternally, for they will continually be immersed by love into the endless mysteries of the Divine life. This will be the true, eternal Liturgy of God and men.

The glory of the righteous will vary depending on their labors during their earthly life. God the Father has many mansions. Some will live upon the new earth—the land of the living, destined for the meek; others in Paradise restored; others in the holy city of Jerusalem; still others in the heavens; while the most perfect of all will abide higher than all the heavens. But all of them will behold the most-bright face of God.

Just as after a thunderstorm the sun is reflected in multitudinous drops of rain, so God will shine in the millions of the saints. Each will look upon Christ, His Father, and the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity will look upon everyone, bestowing upon each everlasting blessedness.

This is the endless end of the second path, the path of the righteous, along which this book is to serve as a guide. May the All-merciful Lord lead into His everlasting Kingdom both the readers and the author of this work, that in us also may be revealed the everlasting glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

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Priest Daniel Sysoev

# THE LAW OF GOD

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